Two centuries before Christ, Jesus, son of Sirach, wrote this book which is a synthesis of the traditions and teachings of the "sages."

He was well-off and well educated and appears to have been the head of an important household with servants. He dealt with many people being involved with works and business which turned out well. In the end, this sage confessed that it was the sacred books which taught him the secret of success. In writing this book, he intended to share with others what he learned in the sacred books, and verified through his own experience.

He wrote a few years before the religious crisis related in the book of Maccabees. Many of his contemporaries to whom the Jewish religion seemed antiquated allowed themselves to be attracted by Greek culture. The author tried to offer a new presentation of the faith of Israel. In no other nation was there a wisdom superior to that of God's people, because it was there, by divine decree, that Wisdom came to dwell. This book shows us how the Law of God leads people to a more human, more intelligent and more responsible personal and social life.

This book consists of two main parts:

– Chapters 1–42 include seven series of maxims. Each one starts with the praise of wisdom. The poem on wisdom in chapter 24 is particularly interesting.

– Chapters 43–51 begin by praising God whose wisdom shines in the order of the universe and continue with a description of God's wise activity through the great people of the Old Testament.

This book is one of the *deuterocanonical* books: see p. 887.

Foreword by the translator from Hebrew to Greek

• The Law, the Prophets and the other Writings which came later have transmitted to us so many and such great lessons that it seems fitting to praise Israel for its reputation in knowledge and wisdom. But it would not be enough to keep these truths for our own instruction: those who love wisdom want to be helpful in what they say and write to those who are not so familiar with her teachings.

My grandfather, Jesus, who devoted himself constantly to the reading of the Law, the Prophets and the later Writings of our fathers and had acquired a thorough familiarity with them, began himself to write something about their teachings and wisdom, in order that those people desiring to gain knowledge might take advantage of his writings and make even greater progress in living according to the Law.

You are therefore invited to read this book with kind consideration and attention, and to show indulgence where, in spite of my painstaking efforts in interpretation, I may appear to have badly conveyed the meaning. Those things, which in this book are written in Hebrew, lose their force when they are translated into another language. In fact, not only this book but the Law itself, the Prophets and

the other Writings differ considerably from the original text.

When I went to Egypt in the thirty-eighth year of King Euergetes and settled there, I found an example of this important teaching and I judged it very necessary to exercise great care and make serious efforts in translating this book.

I have therefore, during this time, devoted many sleepless nights and much study in order to finish this book and to publish it for the use of those who, though they live outside Palestine, wish to become lovers of wisdom and to conform their manner of living to the Law.

Wisdom comes from God

1 • [1] All wisdom comes from the Lord and endures with him forever.

[2] The grains of sand, the drops of rain and the days of eternity, who can count them?

[3] The height of heaven, the extent of the earth and the depths of the abyss, who can measure them?

24:8-9 Pro 8:22 [4] Wisdom was created before all things and the prudent intellect before the beginning of time.

[6] To whom was the source of Wisdom revealed? Who has known her secret designs?

[8] One alone is wise and greatly to be feared. The One who is seated upon his throne.

[9] The Lord himself created Wisdom. He looked on her and knew her value. He poured her out over all his works; [10] upon all mortal beings, in accordance with his goodness. He lavished her on those who love him.

[11] The fear of the Lord is our glory and honor, it is joy and a triumphant crown.

Job 28:28 Ps 111:10 [12] The fear of the Lord gladdens the heart; it gives joy, gaiety and long life.

[13] For the one who fears the Lord all will go well at the end of his life, and he will be blessed on the day of his death.

[14] The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; he put wisdom into the hearts of his faithful ones before their birth.

[15] Founded from eternity she has made her home among people and she will remain faithful to their descendants.

[16] The fear of the Lord is the fullness of wisdom. It will fill you with its fruits.

[17] It will fill your whole house with desirable things.

It will fill your houses with its riches.

[18] The fear of the Lord is the crown of wisdom.

[19] Wherever it is, peace and good health flourish; knowledge and prudence rain down. Wisdom exalts those who possess her.

[20] The fear of the Lord is the root of wisdom. Its branches are long life.

[22] Unjust violence cannot be justified, it will destroy itself by its own excesses.

[23] The patient man will hold out until the appointed time; but finally joy will be given to him.

[24] He will guard his words until the appointed time and in the end many will recognize his worth.

[25] Proverbs rich in content are among wisdom's treasures but the sinner does not want to know about God.

[26] Do you desire wisdom? Keep the commandments and the Lord will give her to you without measure; [27] for fear of the Lord is wisdom and learning; what pleases him is faithfulness and gentleness.

[28] Do not put aside fear of the Lord; approach him with a sincere heart. [29] Do not be a hypocrite before others; watch well your words.

[30] Do not praise yourself lest you fall and bring dishonor on yourself. For the Lord will reveal your secrets and throw you to one side in the midst of the assembly, if you have no fear of the Lord and your heart is full of deceit.

Fear God in time of trials

2 • [1] My son, if you have decided to serve the Lord, prepare yourself for trials. [2] Keep your heart upright and remain resolute; do not be upset in the time of adversity. Jas 1:2-4 Rev 2:3, 10

[3] Hold fast to the Lord, do not separ- Rev 3:21

• The Jews do not use the word "Bible." They refer to the Bible as: "The Law, the Prophets and the Writings," these being the three major headings of the sacred book. See a similar expression in Luke 24:44.

• **1.**1 In this poem, the author professes his faith. To those who think they are more modern because they seek human wisdom and doctrine, he simply declares that true wisdom consists in trusting God and fearing him.

He often speaks of *fearing the Lord* just as the Psalms do. This is different from the fear of pagans who imagine a resentful God.

To fear God is to see him always present and to take decisions in his presence. Whoever knows God is near fears to offend him because he is aware of his love and fidelity. To fear God signifies to respect him and to be mindful of him before all else.

Fearing the Lord is the opposite of fearing what others will say, fearing to be made fun of, or fear of failure. Those who fear the Lord give more importance to what God says, what he promises when he invites us to seek him and to save others.

• **2.**1 Those who want to serve God must

ate yourself from him so that you may be successful to the end of your days.
4 Accept all that happens to you, be
1P 1:7 patient when you are humbled, 5 for as gold is tested in the fire, so those acceptable to God are tested in the crucible of humiliation. 6 Have confidence in him and he will take care of you; follow the right path and hope in him.

7 You who fear the Lord, wait for his mercy and do not turn away lest you fall. 8 You who fear the Lord, trust him and you will not lose your reward. 9 You who fear the Lord, hope for all good things; hope for eternal joy and mercy.

Ps 22:5 10 Remember what happened to your ancestors. Who has ever trusted in the Lord and been confounded? Who has persevered in fear of the Lord and been abandoned? Who has called upon him and not been heard?

Ex 34:6 11 For the Lord is compassion and loving-kindness; he forgives our sins and saves us in time of distress.

12 Woe to faint hearts and weak hands, to the sinner who wavers between two paths.

13 Woe to the fainthearted who lack confidence, because of this they will not be protected. 14 Woe to you who have lost patience! What will you do when the Lord calls you to account?

Jn 14:15, 23 15 Those who fear the Lord do not disobey his commandments; those who love him faithfully keep his laws.

16 Those who fear the Lord seek to please him; those who love him are filled with his law.

17 Those who fear the Lord keep their hearts ready and humble themselves in
2S 24:14 his presence saying, 18 "Let us fall into the hands of the Lord and not into the hands of mortals, for great as his power is his mercy."

Duties towards parents

3 • 1 My children, it is your father who Ex 20:12 Eph 6:1-3 speaks, listen to me and follow my advice and so be saved. 2 For the Lord established that children should respect their father; he confirmed the right of the mother over her children.

3 Whoever honors his father atones for his sins; 4 he who gives glory to his mother prepares a treasure for himself.

5 Whoever honors his father will receive joy from his own children and will be heard when he prays.

6 Whoever glorifies his father will have a long life. Whoever obeys the Lord gives comfort to his mother. 7 He serves those who brought him to birth as he would serve the Lord.

8 Honor your father in word and deed so that his blessing may come on you.
9 For a father's blessing secures the fu- Gen 49:2-27 ture of his children, but a mother's curse destroys them at their roots.

10 Do not rejoice at the humiliation of your father because his dishonor is no glory for you. 11 For a man's glory Pro 19:26 comes from his father's reputation; a mother who is not respected is a disgrace to her children.

12 My child, take care of your father Mt 15:4 in his old age, do not cause him sorrow as long as he lives.

13 Even if he has lost his mind, have patience; do not be disrespectful to him while you are in full health.

14 For kindness done to one's father will never be forgotten, it will serve as reparation for your sins.

15 In the day of adversity the Lord will remember it to your advantage; for just as ice melts in the heat, so will your sins melt away. 16 The man who abandons Ex 21:17 his father is like a blasphemer; he who annoys his mother is cursed by the Lord.

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be ready to face trials and contradictions. Authentic trust in God is demonstrated when things do not turn out well. Along with faith and perseverance, trust is the basic quality of the believer.

• **3.1** This is the best commentary on Moses' commandment concerning children's responsibilities toward their parents. To honor our parents means: to respect, to be understanding and to offer material assistance in their difficulties.

Humility

17 My son, conduct your affairs with discretion and you will be loved by those who are
Mt acceptable to God.
20:26-28 18 The greater you are, the more you should humble yourself and thus you will find
Phil favor with God. 20 For great is the power of the
2:5-8 Lord and it is the humble who give him glory.
Jas 4:6 21 Do not seek what is beyond your powers
Zep nor search into what is beyond your ability.
2:3 22 Reflect on what you are commanded to do; there is no need for you to know things that are hidden.
Ps 23 Do not tire yourself in resolving useless
131:1 questions since the knowledge you already have goes beyond human understanding.
24 For many have been led astray by their personal theories and false pretension has undermined reason.
26 The obstinate man will eventually fall into evil, and he who loves danger will perish therein. 27 The obstinate man will be weighed down with sufferings; the sinner heaps up sin upon sin.
28 For the sufferings of the proud man there is no remedy, the roots of evil are implanted in him. 29 The wise man reflects on proverbs. What the wise man desires is an attentive ear.

Almsgiving

29:8-13 30 As water extinguishes the burning
Dt flames, almsgiving obtains pardon for
17:1-11 sins. 31 The man who responds by doing
Tb good prepares for the future, at the
12:9 moment of his downfall he will find sup-
1P 4:8 port.

4 1 My son, do not deny the poor his food and do not make the man who looks at you with pleading eyes wait.
2 Do not sadden the hungry person nor annoy anyone who is in need. 3 Do not exasperate an angry man nor withhold alms from the beggar.
4 Do not drive away the beggar who is weighed down with afflictions, nor turn away your face from the poor; 5 do not snub the needy nor give anyone a reason to curse you.
Ex 6 If someone curses you in the bitter-
22:22 ness of his heart, the Creator will hear his prayer.
7 Make yourself acceptable to the community; bow your head before the one in authority.
8 Listen to the poor man and reply to him with kind words and with peace.
9 Deliver the oppressed from the hands Job 29:15-17
of the oppressor. Do not be weak when you administer justice. 10 Be like a father towards orphans and like a husband towards their mothers. Then you Lk 6:35 Jn 14:21 will be like a son of the Most High and he will love you more than your own mother.

11 Wisdom brings up her children and takes care of those who look for her. 12 Whoever loves her loves life. Those who rise early in the morning in search of her will be filled with joy.
13 Whoever possesses her will have glory and wherever he goes blessings will follow. 14 Those who serve her are ministers of the Holy One; those who love her are loved of the Lord. 15 He who listens to her will have good judgment. He who obeys her will rest in safety.
16 Whoever trusts in her will possess her and his children after him will inherit her.
17 For in the beginning she will lead him by Mt 7:14
rough paths, causing him to fear and be terrified; she will plague him with her discipline until she can count on him; and she will put him to the test by her demands.
18 Then she will lead him on a level path, give him joy and reveal her secrets to him.
19 But if he wanders from the path, she will abandon him and allow him to be lost.
20 In every situation weigh the pros and cons and avoid evil. A wrong kind of shame could harm you. 21 There is a shame which leads to sin and there is a shame which merits praise and respect. 22 Do not act against your better self to win favor from others. Do not let this kind of shame lead you into sin.
23 Do not remain silent when it is necessary to speak. Do not, through pride, hide your wisdom. 24 It is in speech that wisdom is recognized and learning in the spoken discourse.
25 Do not contradict the truth; rather confess your lack of knowledge.
26 Have no shame in confessing your sins, Lev 5:5
do not swim against the tide. Num 5:7
27 Do not cringe before a fool; do not be influenced by the powerful. Jas 5:16
28 Fight for the truth till death and the Lord will fight for you.
29 Do not be daring in your speech, but lazy 1Jn 3:18
and negligent in works.
30 Do not be like a lion in your household, finding fault with your servants and oppressing those under you.
31 Do not open your hand to receive and Acts 20:35
keep it closed when you should give.

Do not rely on wealth

11:24 Lk 12:15-21 Ps 62:11 **5** • [1] Do not rely on your wealth. Do not say, "I am self-sufficient." [2] Do not let yourself be carried away by greed and violence; they would make you their slave.

Ps 12:4 Rom 2:4 3:25 [3] Do not say, "Who can stop me?" For the Lord has power to punish you. [4] Do not say, "I have sinned and nothing has happened!" For the Lord bides his time.

Ex 20:5-6 [5] Do not be so sure of pardon when you are heaping sin upon sin. [6] Do not say, "His compassion is great! He will forgive the vast number of my sins!" For with him is mercy but also anger; his fury will be poured out on sinners.

Lk 12:35-40 [7] Do not delay your return to the Lord, do not put it off from day to day. For suddenly the anger of the Lord will blaze forth and you will perish on the day of reckoning.

[8] Do not rely on riches wrongfully acquired for they will be of no use to you on the day of wrath.

[9] Do not be swayed by every wind nor try to walk by every path, as does the sinner who Mt 5:37 is accustomed to lie. [10] Remain firm in your convictions, and be consistent in your speech. [11] Be ready to listen, and know how to wait before giving your reply.

[12] If you know what you are saying, answer your neighbor; if not, it is better to say nothing. [13] Your words can bring you honor and dishonor; a man's tongue brings about his downfall.

[14] Do not let yourself be known as a scandalmonger or a deceiver. For if shame is the lot of the robber, severe condemnation is the lot of the liar.

[15] Do not sin in big things nor in little things, and from being a friend do not turn into an enemy. An evil reputation brings in its train shame and disgrace; such is the lot of the sinner who is accustomed to lying.

6 [1] Just as the wicked man inherits confusion and shame so will the sinner accustomed to lying. [2] Do not give yourself over to your passions; they will turn against you and, like a bull, tear you to pieces. [3] They will devour the foliage and destroy the fruit, leaving you like a dry stump. [4] An evil passion will destroy the one who is held in its power; it will make him the laughingstock of his enemies.

Friends

• [5] A gentle word makes many 37:1-6 friends, an agreeable tongue calls forth gracious replies. [6] Let your friends be 37:7-15 many; but your counselors, one in a thousand!

[7] If you would gain a friend, begin by testing him and do not put your confidence in him too quickly. [8] For there is the friend who is such when it suits him but he does not remain faithful in the time of your adversity.

[9] There is the friend who becomes an enemy and, to your confusion, makes known why you quarreled.

[10] There is the friend who shares your table but does not remain faithful when things go against you. [11] In times of prosperity he will be like your shadow and he will speak freely to those of your household. [12] But if you are humiliated, he will turn against you and will avoid meeting you.

[13] Distance yourself from your enemies and be careful about your friends.

[14] The faithful friend is a secure refuge; whoever has found one has found a treasure. [15] A faithful friend is beyond all price; hold him as priceless. [16] A faithful friend is a life-saving remedy, and those who fear the Lord will find one.

[17] Whoever fears the Lord will make true friends for, as a man is, such will his friend be.

[18] My son, dedicate yourself to learning from your youth, and you will grow in wisdom until old age. [19] Work at it like the worker and the sower, cultivate wisdom and wait for her excellent fruits. For in cultivating her you will have some trouble, but soon you will enjoy her fruits.

[20] Wisdom is very severe with the ignorant. Fools will not persevere. [21] She will be like a

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• **5.**1 5:6. At times, some Christians take advantage of God's infinite mercy to continue with their evil behavior.

• **6.**5 Here, we have a text concerning true friendship. Ben Sira invites us not to be naive or off guard.

We should reflect before confiding in a friend, but should also have this *life-saving remedy* which a true friend is, a grace that God grants *to those who fear him.* Also see 12:8-18 and 37:1-15.

6:18-37. We obtain wisdom through a disciplined life.

7:15. Ben Sira appreciates manual work, specifically work in the fields.

heavy weight or a difficult test which he will quickly throw away.

22 For wisdom brings her own honor, she
does not reveal herself to everyone. 23 Listen,
my son, and receive my teaching, do not
Mt reject my counsel. 24 Put her constraints on
11:29 your feet and her yoke on your neck. 25 Put
your shoulder to the burden and bear her
yoke; do not rebel against her chains.
26 Come to her with all your soul and with all
your strength observe her ways. 27 Pursue her,
search for her, she will make herself known to
you; when you have her, do not let her go.

28 For, in the end, you will find in her your
rest and she will become your joy. 29 Her
constraints will strengthen your steps and her
collar will be like a glorious garment. 30 Her
yoke will become an ornament of gold and
her chains like precious girdles of hyacinth
blue. 31 You will adorn yourself as with a
garment of glory and you will put her on like
a crown of jubilation.

32 If you wish, my son, you will be learned;
if you pay attention, you will become clever.
33 If you love to listen, you will learn; if you
really pay attention, you will become wise.

34 Be on your guard in the assembly of the
elders and if there is a wise man there, attach
yourself to him. 35 Be willing to listen to all
discourses on divine things, and do not let the
sayings of the wise escape you.

36 If you see an intelligent man, follow him
from daybreak and let your feet beat a path-
way to his door.

37 Meditate on the precepts of the Lord and
apply yourself unceasingly to his command-
ments. He will strengthen your heart and the
wisdom you desire will be given to you.

7 1 Do no evil and evil will not take hold of
you.

2 Keep away from wrongdoing and it will
Job leave you alone.
4:8 3 Do not sow in the furrows of injustice for
Gal fear of reaping its harvest sevenfold.
6:7-8 4 Do not demand authority from the Lord
Pro nor from the king a place of honor.
25:6-
7 5 Do not make yourself out to be a just man
before the Lord nor a wise man in front of the
king.

Lev 6 Do not seek a position of responsibility
19:15 lest you not be powerful enough to root out
injustice and, overawed by a powerful man,
you lose your integrity.

7 Do not offend the city's assembly; do not
grovel before the people.

8 Do not commit the same sin twice; once
is enough to bring punishment upon you.

Am 9 Do not say, "When I sacrifice to God, the
5:21 Most High will take into account the number
Jas of gifts and he will accept them." 10 Pray with
1:6 a strong spirit and do not neglect to give
alms.

11 Do not despise a man when he is down- 1S
cast, for there is one who casts down and who 2:7
raises up. Lk
1:52

12 Do not lie about your brother; likewise,
do not lie about your friend.

13 Do not allow yourself any kind of lie for
nothing good will come of it.

14 Do not gossip in front of the council of Mt
the elders, nor keep on repeating your words 6:7
in prayer.

15 Do not hate hard work nor the tilling of Pro
the land as instituted by the Most High. 24:27

16 Do not join the company of sinners,
remember that the wrath of God will not be
delayed. 2Mac

17 Remain humble, because the godless 9:9
are punished with fire and worms. Is
66:24

18 Do not exchange your friend for money,
nor a real brother for the gold of Ophir.

19 Do not separate yourself from a wise
and good woman, because a gracious wife is
worth more than gold.

20 Do not maltreat the servant who works Dt
honestly, nor the laborer who works dili- 24:14-
gently. 21 Love the intelligent slave as your- 15
self and do not deprive him of his freedom.

22 Have you any cattle? Take care of them.
If they are profitable to you, keep them.

23 Have you children? Educate them and
teach them to obey from their childhood.

24 Have you any daughters? Guard their
virginity and do not be indulgent towards
them.

25 If you marry off your daughter you will
have accomplished something of impor-
tance, but give her to an intelligent man.

26 Have you a wife who is according to your
liking? Do not send her away. As for the one
you dislike, do not trust her.

27 Honor your father with your whole heart
and do not be forgetful of the sufferings of
your mother.

28 Remember that they gave you birth. Tb
How can you repay them for what they have 4:4
done for you?

29 Reverence the Lord with all your being
and respect the priests.

30 Love your Creator with all your strength
and do not abandon his ministers.

31 Fear the Lord and honor the priest. Give
him the share which has been commanded:
the first harvest, the sin-offering, the shoul-
ders of the victims, the holy offerings and the
first fruits of sacred things.

32 Stretch out your hand to the poor and Dt
you will receive a blessing from the Lord. 14:29

33 May your gifts benefit the living and do
not forget the dead.

34 Do not turn away from those who weep, Rom
and grieve with those who are in sorrow. 12:15

35 Do not neglect to visit the sick because Mt
it is for such acts that you will be loved. 25:36

36 In all your actions remember your last
end and you will never sin.

Prudence and common sense

Pro 10:15 **8** 1 Do not argue with a powerful man lest
you fall into his hands.
2 Do not quarrel with a rich man lest he
throw his weight into the scale against you.
3 Do not argue with a talkative person; do
not heap up wood on his fire.
4 Do not joke with an ignorant man for fear
your ancestors will be insulted.
Mt 7:1-5 1Jn 1:8-10 5 Do not offend the man who repents of his
sins, remember that we are all deserving
punishment.
6 Do not despise a man in his old age,
because we ourselves will grow old.
7 Do not rejoice at the death of any man,
remember that we shall all die.
8 Do not neglect the teaching of the wise,
apply yourself well to their precepts. Through
them you will learn how to live and how to
serve the great.
9 Do not set aside the teachings of the
elders for they also learnt it from their fore-
bears; they will open up your understanding
and enable you to reply at the right moment.
10 Do nothing to arouse the sinner for fear
of being burned by the flames of his fire.
11 Do not annoy the angry man for fear that
he will twist your words to his own advantage.
12 Do not lend to those more powerful than
yourself; if you have lent anything, consider
it as lost.
13 Do not stand surety beyond your
means; if you have done so, be ready to pay.
14 Do not go to law with a judge because,
due to his position, judgment will be given in
his favor.
15 Do not travel with an adventurer lest he
impose himself on you and, as he does what-
ever he pleases, you both perish through his
folly.
16 Do not quarrel with a bad-tempered
person nor get involved with him in a lonely
place; blood counts for little in his eyes and,
when he sees you defenseless, he will attack
you.
17 Do not take counsel with a fool because
he will not be able to remain silent about what
you have said.
18 Do nothing which should be secret be-
fore a stranger because you do not know how
he will react.
19 Do not reveal your secrets to any man,
he will not be grateful to you for doing so.

Man with women

9 • 1 Do not be jealous of your own wife;
do not give her reason to disgrace you.
2 Do not put yourself into the power of any 33:21
woman to the point where she can dominate
you.
3 Do not go near a woman of ill-repute for
fear of falling into her nets.
4 Do not dally with a singing girl for fear of
being caught in her snare.
5 Do not fix your gaze on a young girl for Job 31:1
fear of being involved in her condemnation.
6 Do not deliver yourself into the power of Mt 5:28
prostitutes lest you lose your inheritance.
7 Do not glance about you in the streets of Lk 15:13
the town; do not loiter in lonely places.
8 Turn your eyes away from a good-look- Pro 2:16
ing woman and do not stare at a beautiful
foreigner. For the beauty of a woman has
caused many to fall; in her presence love
blazes up like a fire.
9 Never sit near a married woman or drink
wine with her, for fear that your feelings
towards her be roused and that in your pas-
sion you slide towards your downfall.
10 Do not abandon an old friend, for a new
one has not the same value.
New wine, new friend; let them mature,
then you will enjoy them with pleasure.
11 Do not envy the success of the sinner, Ps 37 73
you do not know what his end will be.
12 Do not take pleasure in what pleases the
godless, remember that they will be punished
before they die.
13 Keep well away from the man who has
power to kill and you will not experience the
fear of death. But if you go with him avoid all
offense for fear that he will deprive you of life:
realize that you are passing through death-
traps and that you are walking on top of the
wall.
14 As far as you can, be sociable and take
counsel with learned men.
15 Love to speak with intelligent men and
let all your discourses be about the law of the
Most High.
16 Let just men be your companions at
table; take pride in your fear of the Lord.
17 An artisan is judged by his work and a
leader of the community, by the wisdom of
his words.
18 A talkative man is dreaded in his town
and the gossip makes himself disliked.

10 1 The wise leader will teach his people;
the government of the intelligent man
will be well-ordered.

• **9.**1 Ben Sira lives in a society which holds women in contempt. It is a society which had not yet discovered the rich quality of married love, so there were great temptations for young and adult men who would easily be satisfied with occasional love. Thus Ben Sira has many warnings against women's seduction, but always as if they were in the first place culpable. See 23:12 and 42:12.

2 As the leader is, so will his ministers be;
as the leader of the city is, so will be its
inhabitants.
3 A king without wisdom will ruin his peo-
ple; a city will prosper through the wisdom of
its rulers.
4 The government of the earth is in the
hands of the Lord; in his own time he will raise
up the right leader.
Rom 13:1 5 Human success is in the hands of the
Lord and he clothes the rulers with his glory.

Pride

Lev 19:18 • 6 Do not store up resentment against
your neighbor, no matter what his offense; do
nothing in a fit of anger.
7 Pride is odious to both God and man;
injustice is abhorrent to both of them.
8 Sovereignty passes from one nation to
another because of injustice, violence and
wealth.
9 How can there be such pride in someone
who is nothing but dust and ashes? Even
while he is living, man's bowels are full of
rottenness.
10 Look: the illness lasts while the doctor
makes light of it; and one who is king today
will die tomorrow.
11 Once a man is dead, grubs, insects and
worms are his lot.
Dt 8:14 12 The beginning of man's pride is to sepa-
rate himself from the Lord and to rebel
against his Creator.
13 The beginning of pride is sin. Whoever
perseveres in sinnĒ g opens the floodgates to
everything that is evil. For this the Lord has
inflicted dire punishment on sinners; he has
reduced them to nothing.
Lk 1:52 14 The Lord has overturned the thrones of
princes and set up the meek in their place.
Dn 2:35 15 The Lord has torn up the proud by the
roots and has planted the humble in their
place.
Wis 11:21 16 The Lord has overturned the land of the
pagans and totally destroyed them.
17 He has devastated several of them, de-
stroyed them and removed all remembrance
of them from the face of the earth.
18 Pride was not created for man nor vio-
lent anger, for those born of woman.
19 Which race is worthy of honor? The
human race.
Which race is worthy of honor? Those who
fear the Lord.
Which race is despicable? The human
race.
Which race is despicable? Those who
break the commandments.
20 The leader is worthy of respect in the
midst of his brethren, but he has respect for
those who fear the Lord. 22 Whether they be
rich, honored or poor, their pride should be in
fearing the Lord.
23 It is not right to despise the poor man
who keeps the law; it is not fitting to honor the
sinful man.
24 The leader, the judge, and the powerful
man are worthy of honor, but no one is
greater than the man who fears the Lord.
25 A prudent slave will have free men as
servants, and the sensible man will not com-
plain.
Lk 17:10 26 Do not feel proud when you have only
accomplished your work; do not put on airs
when times are difficult for you.
27 Of greater worth is the man who works
and lives in abundance than the one who
shows off and yet has nothing to live on.
1Cor 1:31 28 My son, have a modest appreciation of
yourself, estimate yourself at your true value.
29 Who will defend the man who makes an
attempt on his own life? Who will respect the
man who despises himself?
30 The poor man will be honored for his
wisdom and the rich man, for his riches.
31 Honored when poor – how much more
honored when rich!
Dishonored when rich – how much more
dishonored when poor!

11 1 The poor man who is wise carries his
head high and sits among the great.
1S 16:7 2Cor 10:10 2 Do not praise a man because he is hand-
some and do not hold a man in contempt
because of his appearance.
3 The bee is one of the smallest winged
insects but she excels in the exquisite sweet-
ness of her honey.
4 Do not be proud because of the clothes
you wear; do not be proud when people honor
you. Do you know what the Lord is preparing
in a mysterious way? Ecl 4:14 10:6-7 5 Many tyrants have
been overthrown and someone unknown has
received the crown.
6 Many powerful men have been com-
pletely disgraced and famous men handed
over into the power of others.
7 Do not reprehend anyone unless you
have first been fully informed, consider the
case first and thereafter make your reproach.
Pro 18:13 8 Do not reply before you have listened; do
not interrupt the one who is speaking.
9 Do not interfere in what is not your busi-
ness; do not meddle in the disputes of sin-
ners.
10 My child, do not undertake too many
activities. If you keep adding to them, you will
not be without reproach; if you run after them,
you will not succeed nor will you ever be free,
although you try to escape.

• **10.**6 A few words of simple philosophy about suitable modesty for everyone.

Put your trust in God

• 11 There are those who exhaust themselves, tire themselves out and become anxious, yet in the end they are only the poorer.
12 There are those who are weak, needing support, lacking goods and in great poverty, yet the eyes of the Lord look on them with favor. The Lord will redress their humiliation.
13 He will raise their heads and many people will marvel on this account.
Lk 12:16-21 14 Good and evil, life and death, poverty and riches, all come from the Lord.
17 The just can count on the generosity of the Lord and his goodness will guide them forever.
18 A man may become rich through being careful and miserly and this is his reward.
19 The day on which he thinks, "I have earned my rest, now I can live on my possessions," he does not know how long he is going to live. He will have to die and leave his goods to others.
20 Remain faithful to your duty, give your life to it and grow old in your work.
Mt 6:25-26 21 Do not be disconcerted at the success of sinners but have confidence in God and persevere in your own efforts. It is easy for the Lord in an instant to make the poor man rich.
Lk 12:16-21 22 The blessing of the Lord is the just man's reward and quickly, in an instant, his benediction will bear fruit.
Jn 16:21 23 Do not say, "What do I need? What more could I have or desire?"
24 Do not say, "I have all that is necessary, what misfortune can harm me now?"
25 On good days, one forgets the bad; and on bad days one forgets the good.
26 Even when the end draws near, it is easy for the Lord to reward a man according to the way he has lived.
27 The hour of adversity makes one forget pleasure; at the end of a man's life his deeds will be revealed.
28 Do not consider anyone as blessed before his death, for only then he will be known.
29 Do not invite just anybody into your house for many are clever deceivers.
30 Like a partridge in its cage acting as a decoy, so is the heart of the proud man; like a spy he watches out for your weaknesses.
31 He changes good things into evil, he lays his traps and criticizes even the best things.
32 Just as a spark sets coals on fire, the wicked man prepares his snares in order to draw blood.
33 Beware of the wicked man for he is planning evil. He might dishonor you forever.
34 If you take a stranger into your house, he will cause you trouble; he will estrange you from your household.

12 1 If you do good, know to whom you are doing it and you will receive thanks for your kindness.
2 Do good to the godly man and you will receive a reward, if not from the man himself, at least from the Most High.
3 Blessings are not for those who persist in evildoing, nor for those who refuse to show compassion.
4 Give to the godly man, do not help the sinner; 5 do good to the humble, do not give to the ungodly; deny him bread, do not give it to him lest he eventually dominate you. He will repay you with a double evil for all the good that you have done for him.
Mt 5:45 Lk 6:35 6 For the Most High himself detests sinners and carries out his vengeance on the ungodly.
7 Give to the good man but do not help the sinner.
8 A friend does not become an enemy in the time of prosperity, nor does an enemy remain hidden in the time of adversity.
9 When a man is doing well, his enemies are sad; when he is suffering misfortune, even his friends hasten to abandon him.
Pro 26:24-26 10 Never trust an enemy, for his malice is like bronze covered in rust.
11 Even if he should act as a humble man and walk with head bowed down, watch yourself and be on your guard against him. Behave towards him as a man who polishes a bronze mirror. Know that the rust will not remain until the end.
12 Do not place him near you lest he overthrow you and take your place. Do not make him sit on your right hand lest he covet your seat. Let it not be that in the end you understand my words and regret not having listened to my advice.
13 Who will have pity on the snake-charmer bitten by a snake or on those who go near wild beasts? 14 It is the same for the man who joins company with a sinner and finds himself involved in his wrongdoing. 15 The sinner will remain quietly with you for an hour but when you are distracted he will throw away his mask.

• **11.**11 These thoughts are not new in the Bible which encourages us on every page to trust in God. Ben Sira foretells what we will find on the lips of Jesus concerning wealth (see Lk 12:16).
And he says: Love the Covenant, dedicate your life to it. The Covenant means following the Law. Jesus, too, will speak of seeking the kingdom of God instead of being preoccupied with providing for the future.
Note the end of this text. The Book of Sirach, like certain parts of the Book of Job, affirms that God may wait until death to give a reward; but he does not risk speaking of what will follow: faith in the resurrection was as yet undeveloped.

16 The enemy is all sweetness in his
speech, but in his heart he is planning to
throw you in the ditch. The enemy has tears
in his eyes but, if he finds an opportunity, he
cannot have enough of your blood.
17 If misfortune comes to you, you will find
him there before you; pretending to help you,
he will be scheming to get rid of you. 18 He will
wag his head in mockery and clap his hands,
he will whisper unceasingly and will show his
true face.

Beware of the great

13 • 1 He who touches tar will be
soiled; he who associates with an
arrogant man will become like him.
2 Do not carry too heavy a load;
do not make friends with someone
stronger and richer than you. Why put
the earthen pot near the iron one? One
will bang the other and break it.
Pro 18:23 3 The rich man does wrong and is
unconcerned; the poor man is insulted
and apologizes.
4 The rich man uses you as long as
you are useful to him; when you have
nothing left he deserts you.
5 He will stay with you as long as you
have something; he will drain you with-
out a second thought.
6 If he really needs you he will de-
ceive you, smile at you and raise your
hopes; he will speak smooth words and
say, "What would you like?"
7 He will show his gratitude by enter-
taining you until he has taken all you
possess, and he will make fun of you in
the end. Afterwards, when he sees you,
he will have nothing to do with you,
shaking his head when he meets you.
8 Take care not to be deceived and
humiliated through stupidity.
9 When an influential person invites
you, delay and he will call you all the
more.
10 Do not go so far forward that you
are pushed aside or so far back that
you are overlooked.
11 Do not try to talk to him as an
equal or trust his many words. With all
this verbiage he is only trying to test
you and, under pretense of kindness,
he is weighing you up.
12 He will repeat your words without
pity and will not spare you either blows
or chains. 13 Be wary and take great
care because you are walking with your
own stumbling block.
15 All that lives loves its own kind and
each person, his own neighbor.
16 Every animal relates to its own
species and man to his own kind.
17 What has the wolf in common with
the lamb? It is the same with the sinner
and the virtuous man. 18 What kind of
peace can exist between the hyena and
the dog? What peace between the rich
man and the poor man?
19 Wild donkeys are the prey of des-
ert lions; so, also, are the poor the prey
of the rich.
20 The proud man hates humility; so,
also, the poor man is detestable to the
rich.
21 When the rich man stumbles, his Pro 19:4, 7
friends support him, but when the poor
man falls, his friends desert him.
22 When the rich man gets into Pro 14:20
trouble, there are many who come to
his rescue; if he speaks nonsense, they
congratulate him. When the poor man
makes a mistake, they criticize him; if
he speaks sensibly, they pay no atten-
tion. 23 When the rich man speaks, all
are silent and they praise his words to
the skies. The poor man speaks and
people ask, "Who is this?" And if he
stumbles, they push him down.
24 Wealth is good if there is no sin in it

• **13.**1 This long paragraph is an invitation not to seek the company of those above us. Often the *rich,* those above, are godless, without conscience. The author points out the dangers:
– those above take advantage of those who seek to become familiar with them;
– to be admitted into the friendship of the rich, we have to accept many humiliations and to forget our own dignity;
– contact with the rich will lead us to imitate their faults.

and poverty is evil when it is the reward for godlessness.

Enjoy life without being greedy

Pro 15:13 25 Man's heart is reflected in his face, for better or for worse.

26 Does he show a happy face? All is going well to him. Has he found words of wisdom? He has reflected on suffering.

14 1 Happy the one who has not sinned in speech or who feels no remorse for his faults.

2 Happy is he whose own conscience does not condemn him and who has not fallen from his ideals.

3 Wealth does not befit the small-minded man; why would you give the greedy man Job 27:16-17 riches? 4 He who hoards, depriving himself, is hoarding for others: others will enjoy his goods. Lk 12:16-21

5 He who is mean to himself, with whom will he be good? He does not even enjoy his own riches.

6 There is nothing worse than one who is mean to himself, this is how his evil repays him.

7 If he does good, he does it without realizing it but, in the end, his evil will be revealed.

8 Evil is the greedy-eyed man who does not pay attention to persons and looks down on people.

9 The ambitious man is not content with what he has, wicked injustice shrivels up the heart.

10 The envious eye covets the food of others; there will be misery and famine at his table.

11 My son, use well whatever you have and give worthy offerings to the Lord.

12 Remember that death will not delay and your time has not yet been revealed to you.

13 Be good to your friend before you die and be generous to him in any way you can.

Ecl 2:24 14 Enjoy happiness and do not reject lawful pleasure when it comes your way.

15 Will you not have to leave to another the fruit of your works? The fruit of your labor, will it not be shared out by lot?

16 Give, take and treat yourself well, for in the netherworld there are no pleasures to seek.

17 All living things grow old like clothing. This is the eternal law: "You will die."

18 Like green leaves on a bushy tree: some sprout and others fall off, so are the generations of flesh and blood: one dies and another is born. 19 All finite things pass away and their maker with them. Rev 14:13

Happy the one seeking wisdom

20 Happy the one who is intent on wisdom and who can reply to those who question him; 21 who makes his own the ways of wisdom and meditates on her secrets; 22 who pursues her like a hunter, lies in wait by her paths, 23 peeps in at her windows and listens at her doors; 24 he sets up camp near her house, fixing his stakes in her walls.

25 He places his tent in the hands of wisdom; he stays in a happy lodging. 26 He places his sons beneath her protection and finds shelter beneath her branches. 27 He is shaded by her from the heat and makes his camp in her glory.

15 1 Such is the one who fears the Lord; whoever embraces the Law will obtain wisdom. Wis 6:16 8:12 2 She will come out to meet him like a mother and greet him like a virgin bride; 3 she will feed him with the bread of understanding and give him the water of wisdom to drink. 4 He will rely on her and will not waver; he will lean on her and will not be let down.

5 Wisdom will make him greater than his friends and he will be able to speak in the full assembly. Wis 8:10-15 6 He will be crowned with happiness and joy. He will inherit an everlasting name.

7 The fool will never possess her, and sinners will never set eyes on her. 8 She is far away from pride, and liars will know nothing of her.

9 Praise is not fitting on the lips of sinners since it does not come from the Lord. 10 Praise must come from the wise man; so the Lord himself inspires it.

God made us free and responsible

• 11 Do not say, "It was God who made

• **15.**11 This poem clearly declares that human beings are free and responsible. In his letter (1:13), James will recall the first sentence of this paragraph. In Deuteronomy 30:15-20, Moses already told his people: "Life and death are before you; choose."

me sin." God does not cause what he hates.

Jas 1:13-14 [12] Do not say, "He made me do wrong," for he has nothing to do with a sinner. [13] The Lord hates all evil and those who fear him hate it as well.

[14] When he created man in the beginning, he left him free to make his own decisions. [15] If you wish, you can keep the commandments and it is in your power to remain faithful.

[16] He has set fire and water before you; you stretch out your hand to whichever you prefer.

Dt 11:26 30:15-20 [17] Life and death are set before man: whichever a man prefers will be given him.

[18] How magnificent is the wisdom of the Lord! He is powerful and all-seeing.

[19] His eyes are on those who fear him. He knows all the works of man.

[20] He has commanded no one to be godless and has given no one permission to sin.

No happiness for the wicked

Pro 17:21 19:13 **16** [1] Do not long for a brood of worthless children, and take no joy in godless sons.

[2] However many you have, do not rejoice in them if they have no fear of God.

[3] Do not depend on their having a long life, or trust in their number, because one is better than a thousand and their death is preferable to their being godless.

Wis 3:19 [4] A city can arise from one man who is prudent. Yet, even though the wicked become a great tribe, they will be destroyed. [5] I have seen such things with my own eyes and my ears have heard of still greater things.

[6] Fire has come upon the meeting of sinners and God's wrath is kindled against rebellious people.

Gen 6:1-7 [7] God did not pardon the leaders of old who rebelled in their pride of strength.

Gen 19:1-29 [8] He did not spare the city where Lot lived; he detested their pride.

[9] He showed no pity on the people doomed to destruction; they were annihilated for their sins.

[10] In the same way, he dealt with the six hundred thousand men who, in the hardness of their hearts, had revolted.

Ex 34:6-7 [11] Had there been only one stubborn man it would have been amazing if he had escaped unpunished, since mercy and anger belong to the Lord who is powerful both in forgiveness and in punishment.

[12] His justice is as great as his mercy and he judges people by their deeds.

[13] Just as the sinner will not escape with his booty, the patience of the upright man will not go unrewarded.

[14] God will reward every act of mercy; each person will be treated according to his deeds.

[17] Do not say, "I will hide from the Lord; who will remember me up there? I will not be recognized in the midst of so many. What am I in the immensity of creation?"

[18] Look: the sky and the heavens above the sky, the sea and the earth tremble when he comes.

[19] The mountains, together with the foundations of the earth, are filled with dread before his sight.

[20] But nobody thinks of such things: who is interested in the ways of God?

Rom 11:33 [21] Most of his works go unnoticed and man does not see where the storm originates.

[22] "Who tells us of the interventions of God? Who expects them? The Covenant is far away."

[23] Such are the thoughts of the man of little sense, the foolish, dissolute man who loves his illusions.

[24] Listen to me, my sons; acquire knowledge and apply your heart to my words. [25] I will expound the teaching step by step and impart knowledge carefully.

God the Creator

42:20-25 • [26] God created his works from the beginning and, as he made them, he assigned to each its place. [27] He arranged them for all time, their beginning and their unfolding. They do not

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At times the Bible seems to say that God pushes a person to sin in order to punish him later (see Ex 10:27; 2 S 24:1); yet there is no doubt that humans are free. The Israelites were so convinced that nothing is done without God, that they had trouble explaining how someone can sin without this being God's will. Even though they lacked the words to express it, they always saw human beings as persons responsible for their actions.

• **16.**26 Here we have an optimistic vision of humankind. God gave them power over all things on earth. This is why they must not give themselves to evil.

He put his own eye in their hearts (17:8): this means conscience and intuitions of the spirit (see Pro 4: 23) which lets us see the work of God.

What is greatest in us is not reason which discusses and argues, but an intuition of the truth, which in a time seeks reasons to support it. When we forget about this intuition which is in fact the dynamic of scientific research, we are always capable of using reason in such a way that denies the evidence of the divine presence in the universe. It is this divine capacity that leads us to true wisdom.

Then, God had to reveal himself to us, so that this capacity to come to the truth would lead to sound knowledge, decisive in terms of the direction of our lives: in verses 11-14, the author refers to the gift of the Law to Israel through Moses.

hunger or grow weary and they never cease from their duties. 28 Not one has collided with its neighbor; they will never disobey his commands.

29 Afterwards, the Lord looked down on the earth and filled it with his riches.
Ps 104:29 30 He covered its surface with all kinds of living things which must return to it.

Gen 2:7 Ecl 3:20 12:7 **17** 1 The Lord created man from the earth and let him return to earth. 2 He settled a fixed time for them and a
Gen 1:28 6:3 Wis 9:2-3 set number of days, giving them power over everything on earth. 3 He endowed them with a strength like his own, mak-
Gen 1:27 ing them in his own image.

4 He put the fear of them in all living things, thus they had mastery over the animals and birds. 6 He endowed them with knowledge; he gave them tongue and eyes, ears and a mind to think with.

7 He filled them with wisdom and knowledge; he taught them good and
Wis 13:1 Rom 1:19-20 evil. 8 He put his own eye in their hearts so they would understand the greatness of his works. 10 They will praise his holy Name and 9 relate the magnificence of his creation.

11 He gave them revealed knowledge as well and handed over to them the Law of life. 12 He established an everlasting covenant with them and let them know his judgments.

Dt 4:11-12 13 Human eyes saw the splendor of the Glory of God; their ears heard the grandeur of his voice. 14 He said to them, "Keep yourselves from all wrongdoing," and to each of them he gave commands regarding his neighbor.

15 Their conduct is always before the Lord; they cannot escape his sight.

Dt 7:6 17 He has placed a leader over each nation, but Israel is the Lord's own portion.

19 Their deeds are as clear as the sun to him, he always observes their ways.

20 Their misdeeds cannot be hidden from him, all their sins are before the Lord.

22 He holds a man's almsgiving dear as a priceless signet ring; he cherishes a good deed like the apple of his eye.

23 One day he will rise and reward them; he will place their prize on their heads.

24 He allows those who repent to return; he comforts those whose hopes are fading.

25 Be converted to the Lord and give up your sins, plead with him to lessen your offense.

26 Return to the Almighty, turn aside from wrongdoing and totally detest evil.

27 For who in the grave will praise the Ps 115:17 Almighty, if the living do not give him glory?

28 The dead man is as if he did not exist and cannot give praise; he who has life and health can praise the Lord.

29 How great is the mercy of the Lord and his forgiveness for those who turn to him!

30 Man cannot have everything in his power since he is not immortal.

31 What is brighter than the sun? Yet it disappears. Man is no more than flesh and blood, yet he thinks of doing evil. 32 While the sun surveys the stars in the lofty sky, human beings remain dust and ashes.

The greatness of God

18 1 He who lives forever created all without exception. 2 The Lord alone will be found righteous.

4 He has made no one powerful enough to proclaim his works; who then, will reveal his marvels?

5 Who can calculate the power of his majesty and relate his great goodness?

6 Nothing can be added to him or taken away; no one can fathom the wonders of the Lord.

7 When man thinks he has finished, then he Ps 139:17 is only beginning and when he stops he is puzzled by it all.

8 What is man? What is his purpose? What is the good in him and what the bad?

9 Take the length of his life: a hundred Ps 90:10 years is long. 10 Like a drop of water from the sea, a grain of sand, such are his few years compared with eternity.

11 For this reason, the Lord has patience with them and pours out his mercy on them.

12 He sees and realizes how miserable their end is and so he heaps his forgiveness upon them.

13 Man's mercy is for his neighbor but the compassion of the Lord reaches all people; he rebukes, corrects, teaches and brings back his flock like a shepherd. 14 He takes pity on those who accept correction and eagerly seek his will.

15 My son, do not mix your favors with unkind remarks or your gifts with bitter words.

16 Does not dew temper the heat? So, too, a kind word is much better than a gift.

17 The gift is not as valuable as the words which accompany it, but a generous man brings both.

18 The fool intends to please but insults, a
grudging man's gift makes the eyes smart.
19 Find out the facts before you speak; look
after yourself before you become ill.
20 Examine yourself before judgment
comes and, on the day of God's visitation,
you will be forgiven.
21 Humble yourself before you become ill
and show repentance for your sins.
22 Let nothing prevent you from fulfilling
your vow on time; do not wait until death to
put things in order.
Ecl 23 Prepare yourself before praying and do
5:1-6 not be one of those who tempt the Lord.
24 Keep in mind the justice of the last days;
God will turn his face from you on the day of
vengeance.
25 When you experience abundance, re-
member the days of famine; when you enjoy
riches, think of poverty and misery.
26 Time slips by between morning and
evening, all things pass quickly before the
Lord.
27 The prudent man is cautious in every-
thing; when sin abounds he will keep away
from wrongdoing.
28 Every sensible man recognizes wisdom
and respects those who obtain her.
29 Those who speak sensibly are wise, and
marvelous sayings flow from them.
30 Do not let your passions rule you and
restrain your desires.
31 If you satisfy your lusts you will make
yourself the laughingstock of your enemies.
32 Do not take pleasure in great luxury, lest
you become impoverished by its expense.
33 Do not impoverish yourself by feasting
on credit when you have nothing in your
pocket.

19 1 A drunken worker will never be rich;
he who is careless in small things will
soon fall.
2 Wine and women corrupt the best of
men; whoever frequents prostitutes loses all
sense of shame. 3 He will be the victim of
grubs and worms and lose his life because of
his stupidity.

When to speak and when to be silent

• 4 He who is too quick to trust others
reveals a shallow mind, whoever sins
injures himself.
5 One who revels in pleasure will be
condemned, 6 hating gossip will save
one from evil.
7 Never repeat what you are told and
you will come to no harm.
8 Report nothing to friend or foe and,
unless silence is sinful, reveal it to no
one. 9 They will listen, distrust you and
you will end up being hated.
10 Have you heard something? Let it
die with you, remain calm; you will not
burst with it.
11 A fool suffers like a woman in
childbirth over something he is told.
12 Like an arrow stuck in his thigh, such
is a secret inside a fool.
13 Speak with your friend: perhaps he
has done nothing and, if he has, he will
not do it again.
14 Speak with your friend: perhaps he
has not said anything and, if he has, he
will not say it again. 15 Speak with your
friend for there is much slander; do not
believe all that you hear. 16 Often, unin-
tentional slips are made; for who has
never sinned by evil tongues? 17 Speak
with your neighbor before you heap
accusations on him; then leave room
for the Law of the Almighty.

20 All wisdom is in the fear of the Lord; in all
wisdom is the fulfillment of the Law.
22 Knowledge of evil is not wisdom, and
prudence is not found in the advice of sinners.
23 There is a cleverness that is loathsome;
it belongs to the evildoer who lacks wisdom.
24 Better to lack sense and be full of the fear
of the Lord, than to be clever in violating the
Law.
25 There is an ingenious shrewdness which
carries out injustice; it is the art of dissimu-
lating in order to do evil. 26 One pretends to be
grieving and weighed down with burdens but
in his heart there is only cunning; 27 he hides
his face and pretends to be deaf, but as soon
as you are distracted, he will take advantage
of you.
28 One does not sin when the means are
lacking; at the first opportunity, he will do
wrong.
29 You can tell a man by his appearance;
the responsible man can be recognized by his
face.
30 A man's way of dressing reveals who he
is, as does his manner of laughing and walk-
ing.

• **19.**4 In many passages throughout the book of Sirach, as in Proverbs, the author shows that controlling one's tongue is a prerequisite for dominating our person and our destiny (James 3).

The stupid and foolish

20 • [1] There are rebukes which are inopportune; there is the silence of a sensible man.
[2] Better to rebuke than nurse a grudge.
[3] He who recognizes his fault diminishes its consequences.
[4] Like a eunuch desiring to violate a girl, such is he who uses force in pretending to be just.
Pro 17:28 [5] One keeps silent and is thought to be wise, the other makes himself hated because of his gossiping.
[6] One remains silent because he does not know how to reply; the other keeps quiet, waiting for the right moment.
[7] The wise man keeps silent until the right moment; the chatterer and fool speak out of turn.
[8] He who speaks too much makes himself hated; he who wishes to impose himself stirs up ill will.
[9] Man can turn his troubles to his advantage; a lucky chance can turn to loss.
[10] There is a type of generosity which will not reward you and another which will repay you double.
Lk 1:52 [11] One is humiliated for having had honors; another is humiliated, and then lifts up his head.
[12] One buys much with little money; another pays seven times its value.
[13] The wise man makes himself lovable through his words alone, while the favors of the fool are lost.
[14] The fool's gift is not to your advantage; he gives with greedy eyes. [15] He gives little but puts on a great outward appearance and exclaims for all to hear; he lends today and recovers the loan tomorrow; he is a despicable man.
[16] The fool says, "I have no friends, no one welcomes my favors. [17] Those who eat my bread have evil tongues." How often they will mock him, and by how many!
[18] Better to stumble on the ground than to make a slip with the tongue; this is how easily the wicked fall.
[19] The rough-mannered man is like an indiscreet story that ill-mannered people tell out of time.
[20] The proverb told by a fool will fail, since he does not speak it at an appropriate time.
[21] One keeps himself from sin because he does not have the means to act; when he gets the chance, he will have no remorse.
[22] One loses his soul out of false shame; he loses himself for fear of what a foolish man thinks. [23] Out of false shame he wants to win a friend; he gets an enemy, in fact, for nothing.
[24] Lying is a shameful defect in a man; fools are used to it. Pro 13:5
[25] Better to be a thief than a liar, yet both are heading for disaster.
[26] Habitual lying is detestable; disgrace never leaves the liar. Pro 12:22
[27] The wise man's words advance his cause; the shrewd man will gain favor with the powerful.
[28] He who tills the earth increases his produce; he who pleases the great is forgiven his wickedness.
[29] Presents and gifts blind a wise man's eyes; like a muzzle they silence the conscientious.
[30] Concealed wisdom and hidden treasure: what good are these?
[31] The man who conceals his stupidity is better than one who conceals his wisdom.

21 [1] Have you sinned, my son? Do not do it again and beg forgiveness for your past sins.
[2] Escape from sin as you would from a snake; if you go near, it will bite you. Its teeth are like those of a lion and destroy human lives.
[3] All evil is like a double-edged sword which inflicts wounds past remedy. Pro 5:4
[4] Violence and pride bring down the rich; the arrogant man's house will be brought low.
[5] The poor man's prayer reaches the ears of the Lord and his judgment will not delay.
[6] Whoever hates correction goes the way of sinners; he who fears the Lord turns to him in his heart.
[7] The chatterer is known everywhere, but the discreet man recognizes his weakness.
[8] Building a house with borrowed money is like collecting stones for your own tomb.
[9] The meeting of sinners is like a pile of rope which will go up in fire and flames.
[10] The path of sinners is well paved but it ends in the fiery abyss. Mt 7:13
[11] He who keeps the Law is in control of his thoughts; the fear of the Lord brings wisdom.
[12] The man who is not clever will never be taught; but there is a cleverness which leads to bitterness.
[13] The wise man's knowledge spreads out like a flood and his advice is like a spring.
[14] The fool's heart is like a broken glass which cannot hold any teaching.
[15] If an educated man hears a wise saying he values it and adds another. If the good-for-nothing hears it he is annoyed and tosses it over his shoulder.

• **20.**1 We must avoid two errors: correction with anger, because we fall into excesses, and being resentful in silence, without letting off steam.

16 The fool's talk weighs like a load while
the wise man's words give rest.
17 The assembly awaits the wise man's
words; each one takes to heart whatever he
says.
18 The fool's wisdom is like a house in
ruins, the knowledge of the fool amounts to
nonsense.

The stupid and foolish

• 19 As far as the fool is concerned,
instruction is no more than handcuffs
and fetters. 20 The idiot laughs aloud
while the intelligent man merely smiles
quietly.
21 Instruction is like a golden orna-
ment to the shrewd man, like a bracelet
on his right arm.
22 The fool steps inside the house
immediately, the experienced man
would not be so bold. 23 The fool looks
in through the door, the polite man re-
mains outside. 24 Listening outside
doors reveals a bad upbringing, the up-
right man would be ashamed of doing
so.
25 Strangers speak thoughtlessly of
everything, while wise men's words are
carefully weighed. 26 The heart of fools
is in their mouth, but the mouth of the
wise is in their heart.
27 When the godless man curses his
opponent, the curse descends on him-
self. 28 The slanderer taints himself and
makes himself hated by all around him.

22 1 The idler is like a dirty stone, his
disgrace is laughed at.
2 The idler is like a heap of dung, all who
touch it shake it off their hands.
3 Badly brought up sons are the shame of
their father, and daughters, a humiliation.
4 A sensible daughter is a treasure to her
husband, but the disgraceful one is a burden
to her father.
5 A shameless daughter brings disgrace
on her father as well as her husband; both
hate her.
6 The untimely word is like music at a
funeral but beating and correction guided by
wisdom are never out of place.
9 Teaching a fool is like gluing a broken jar,
it is easier to awaken a man from deep sleep.
10 Reasoning with a fool is like reasoning with
a drowsy man; in the end, he will ask you,
"What is it all about?"
11 Weep for the dead man since the light
has deserted him, weep for the fool because
understanding has deserted him.
Cry less for the dead man; he has found his
rest but the fool's life is worse than death.
12 Mourning the dead lasts seven days, but
it lasts a lifetime for the fool and godless man.
13 Do not waste words on the fool or go with
the stupid man; beware of him lest he bring
you trouble and his contact leave you con-
taminated. Stay away from him if you want
rest and do not want to be worn out by his
requests.
14 What is heavier than lead? What is its
name but "Fool"?
15 Sand, salt and a load of iron are easier to
bear than a fool.
16 The wooden joint in a building is not
dislodged by an earthquake; a determined
heart, after careful reflection, will not be
moved when crises come.
17 A decision based on serious reflection
stands like plaster on a firm wall.
18 Stakes set on a height do not resist the
wind; the fool's heart, frightened by his own
imaginings, cannot withstand fear.
19 Striking the eye brings tears; if you strike
the heart, lucidity will come forth.
20 Whoever throws stones at birds scares
them off; reproach a friend and you will kill
the friendship.
21 If you have drawn your sword against a
friend, do not despair, it can be put back; 22 if
you have spoken harshly to a friend, do not
fear, reconciliation is possible; but in the
event of insult, contempt, betrayal of a con-
fidence or treacherous blow, any friend would
desert you.
23 Win your neighbor's confidence when
he is poor so that you may enjoy his goods
with him when he grows rich; be loyal in his
hour of trouble and you will win, in the end, a
share in his inheritance.
24 Smoke and fumes precede the fire; so,
too, insults herald the blows.
25 I will not be ashamed of protecting a
friend nor will I avoid him; 26 if evil comes to
me from him, all who hear of it will beware of
him.

27 Who will put a guard on my mouth
and effectively lock up my lips to pre-
vent me from sinning and my tongue
from hastening my ruin?

Ps 141:3

• **21.**19 The politeness of well-educated people shows their noble spirit. When we are truly wise, we instinctively discover the rules of good and noble conduct. As Saint Francis de Sales used to say: "Courtesy is the precious flower of charity."

23 • [1] O Lord, Father and master of my life, do not abandon me to the thoughtless words of my lips or allow me to fall because of them.

Ps 141:5 [2] Who will deal out punishment to my thoughts and apply the discipline of wisdom to my heart? [3] Let them not be indulgent at my sins or the mistakes of my mind, lest my errors increase and sins multiply, and I fall into the hands of my enemies, to the joy of my foes.

[4] Lord, Father and God of my life, do not allow me to become haughty; [5] keep greed far away from me.

[6] Do not let lust and lechery take hold of me; do not deliver me to filthy passions.

[7] Children, learn how to control your language; if you are able to watch over it, you will not be taken by surprise.

[8] The sinner will be caught in his own words, as happens to the proud man and to him who curses.

Mt 5:34 Jas 5:12 [9] Do not get used to swearing, taking the name of the Holy One.

[10] For, just as the slave who is constantly watched will not escape without blows so you, also, will not be found guiltless after constantly calling upon his name.

[11] The man who swears habitually will be found full of sins, and disgrace will not depart from his house. If he fails to keep his oath due to carelessness, punishment will descend upon him; if he fails knowingly, his sin is double and if he has sworn falsely, he will not be forgiven; in any case, his house will be filled with disasters.

About impurity and adultery

• [12] There is a way of talking which deserves death; let it not be used by Jacob's descendants. Virtuous people keep far away from it and do not wallow in sin.

[13] Do not accustom your mouth to foul language for it will be sinful talk.

[14] Remember your father and mother when you are sitting in the company of the great, lest you forget yourself in their presence and act like a fool. Then you would wish you had never been born, and curse the day of your birth.

[15] A man used to indecent talk will never be reformed in his lifetime.

[16] Two kinds of people multiply sins and a third attracts the Lord's anger:

A blazing passion which burns like fire will not be extinguished until it burns itself up.

A man who seeks pleasure from his own body, he will not give up until he catches fire; [17] to the indecent man, all food tastes sweet and he will not be satisfied until death.

[18] The man unfaithful to the marriage bed who thinks like this, "Who sees me? Darkness surrounds me, the walls hide me; nobody can see me. Why should I worry? The Almighty will not take note of my faults."

[19] He fears the scrutiny of men and does not realize that the Lord's eyes are a thousand times brighter than the sun, that they watch the conduct of all men and penetrate into the most secret corners. [20] All things were present to him before they were created and so will they be after their end.

[21] This man will be punished in view of the whole city, he will be caught when he least expects it.

[22] In the same way, the woman who is unfaithful to her husband and gives him an heir by another man will be pun-

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• **23.**1 Prayer of the youth who discovers his weakness when faced with life's temptations. Prayer of the adult person who has experienced that evil is deeply-rooted in his heart. An invitation to parents to look after their children's training.

The sin of the tongue (or the lips) means, first of all, proud words and proud projects. This is always the beginning of all the other sins.

• 12. Ben Sira speaks of impurity in the traditional sense: sin against chastity.

– In 23:12-15, he speaks of vulgar words and malicious conversations. As Jesus says in Matthew 12:34: *the mouth speaks of what fills the heart.*

– 23:16-21 refers to extramarital relationships.

– 23:22-23 deals with an adulterous woman, though it can also be applied to the adulterous man: 1) it is a sin against God; 2) it is a sin against the spouse; 3) it is a sin against the family's honor.

ished. 23 First, she has disobeyed the Law of the Almighty. Secondly, she has sinned against her husband and thirdly, she is tainted with adultery, for she has had children by another man.

24 She will be taken before the assembly and questioned about her children. 25 The children will not be able to take root; their branches will not bear fruit. 26 She will leave behind a cursed memory and her shame will never be blotted out.

27 People who have seen her will know that nothing matters more than the fear of the Lord and nothing is sweeter than fulfilling his commands.

The hymn of wisdom

Job 28 Pro 1:20 8 9:1-6 Bar 3:9

24 • 1 Listen to wisdom singing her own praises and extolling herself in the midst of her people. 2 See, she opens her mouth in the assembly of the Most High, she glories in herself before the Almighty.

3 I came out from the mouth of God and covered the face of the earth like a mist; although 4 my dwelling place is Ex 13:21 in the highest heavens, my throne is within a pillar of cloud.

5 I alone have seen and understood the vault of the skies and strolled through the depths of the abyss, 6 taking possession of the raging sea and of the earth as well, with all its peoples and nations.

7 In all of these, I looked for a place to rest; in which territory would I set up my abode?

8 Then the creator of the universe commanded me, he who created me assigned the place of my rest, "Pitch your tent in Jacob; Israel will be your homeland." Pro 8:27 Ps 132:8

9 He created me from the beginning, before time began, and I will never cease to be, 10 I celebrate in his presence the liturgy of his Holy Dwelling and this is why I settled in Zion.

11 The Lord let me rest in his beloved city and Jerusalem is the heart of my kingdom. 12 I took root in the people God has favored, in the land of the Lord, in their inheritance.

13 I grew like a cedar in Lebanon, as the cypress on Mount Hermon.

14 I grew like the palm trees in Engedi and the rosebuds of Jericho; as a magnificent olive on the plains and like a plane tree I grew tall.

15 I poured out my perfume like a fragrant flower, like exquisite myrrh I have given choice scent; like fragrant plants and as the smoke of incense which burns in the Sanctuary of God.

16 I spread out my branches like a vine; these are Glory and Grace. 17 As a vine I put out graceful shoots and my blossoms are riches and glory.

19 Come to me, you who desire me and take your fill of my fruits. 20 To Ps 19:11 experience me is sweeter than honey

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• **24.**1 This poem attributed to the Wisdom of God is similar to those in Proverbs 8 and Wisdom 7. What is emphasized here is the presence of Wisdom in God's people.

Two events from sacred history help us understand this presence of God himself through his Wisdom:

– the *cloud* which accompanied the Hebrews in the desert (see Ex 13:21);

– the *Tent* which served as sanctuary in the desert (see Ex 25).

The first image teaches us that God's glory so surpasses us, that we can only know something of God when he hides his glory in the cloud. The second image teaches us that the real dwelling of God is not something material that we call "heaven"; God dwells in this world in a mysterious and provisional way, as in a tent.

The Wisdom of God rules the universe and all the nations. It has inspired the sages and the religions of all countries and yet it came in a special way to Israel, which is its dwelling and inheritance. This prepares us for what John says in his Gospel 1:3 and 1:9: the Wisdom of God is Christ, and the people through whom it will be present is the Church.

Catholic liturgy has used this poem for the feasts of the Virgin Mary, because the words fit the role that God gave her in the Church. On the day of the Annunciation, she received the Wisdom in the name of all. This is why she has been granted to be the first of God's people and the mother of all others.

The last verses return to practical things: the Wisdom of God is found especially in the Law, that is, in the book of his words.

and to possess me sweeter than any
Jn 4:13 6:35 honeycomb. 21 Those who eat me will
hunger still; those who drink me will
thirst for more. 22 Those who obey me
will not be put to shame; those who
serve me will not fall into sin.

Dt 33:4 23 All this is in the Bible, the Testa-
ment of the Most High God, the book of
the Law which Moses entrusted to us,
the inheritance of the congregations of
Israel.

25 This Law feeds the springs of wis-
dom, like the Pishon or Tigris in the
Jos 3:15 season of fruit. 26 Waters overflowing
with understanding come from it, as
from the Euphrates and Jordan at har-
vest time; 27 the floods of instruction run
like the Nile or the Gihon in time of
vintage.

28 He who comes first is unable to
grasp her fully and neither will the last
exhaust her. 29 For her thoughts are
wider than the sea and her designs,
deeper than the abyss.

I have not worked for myself alone

• 30 I, for my part, went forth like a
brook from a river, a stream diverted
Ezk 47:1-12 into a delightful garden. 31 I thought,
"Let me irrigate my orchard and water
my flowers." But now my brook has
grown into a river and the river, into a
sea.

32 May my teaching shine forth like
the dawn; may I carry its light to far-
away places. 33 I will spread my teach-
ing like a prophecy and leave it to fu-
ture generations.

34 See, all of you, that I have not
worked for myself alone but for all
those who seek wisdom.

25 1 Three things delight me and are de-
lightful to God and people: agreement
between brothers, friendship between neigh-
bors, and perfect harmony between husband
and wife.

2 There are three kinds of persons whom I
detest and whose existence I cast away from
me: a poor man full of pride, a rich man who
is a liar, and an adulterous old man who is a
fool.

3 If you have saved nothing in your youth,
what will you have in old age?

4 What a great thing is old age with sound
judgment, an old man who can counsel!

5 What a great thing is wisdom in those
who are old, or understanding and prudence
in the great.

6 Rich experience is the crown of the old,
their pride is the fear of the Lord.

7 I think of nine things which I consider
happy and a tenth to which I will also refer: the
man who finds his happiness in his children;
the man who sees the ruin of his enemies in
his lifetime. 8 Happy the man who lives with a
sensible wife; he who does not plow with a
donkey and ox; he who has done no wrong in
speech; he who does not serve an unworthy
master. 9 Happy he who has acquired good
sense and is able to speak before an attentive
audience! 10 Great is he who has gained wis-
dom, but no one surpasses the man who fears
the Lord.

11 Since the fear of the Lord excels every-
thing, who can compare with the one who
possesses it?

13 Any wound rather than the wound of
the heart; any wickedness rather than the
wickedness of a woman; 14 any sadness
rather than that inflicted by an enemy; any
vengeance rather than the vengeance of a
foe.

15 There is no poison worse than a snake's
venom, there is no rage worse than an
enemy's.

16 Better to live with a lion and a snake than
Pro 21:9, 19 27:15 to share a house with a wicked woman.

17 Wickedness disfigures a woman's ap-
pearance, it saddens the face, making her
look like a bear.

18 When her husband dines with his neigh-
bor, he sighs bitterly, in spite of himself.

19 All wickedness is nothing compared
with a woman's wickedness. Let her lot be
that of a sinner!

20 As a sandhill is to an old man's feet, so
is the talkative woman to her quiet husband.
21 Do not be fooled by a woman's beauty or
fall in love with her.

22 Expect anger, reproach and plenty of
shame when the wife rules the husband.

23 Dejected spirits, a sad face and unseen
wounds, these are the work of a wicked
woman. Idle hands and unsteady knees are

• 30. *Ben Sira is a sage.* After years of fidelity in his duty as father of a family, counselor and businessman, he marvels at all that he has received from divine Wisdom. He is well aware that his work is of exceptional importance for many believers in the future, and he gives thanks to God. *The All-powerful has done great things for me* (Lk 1:49).

found when a wife brings her husband no happiness.

24 For sin began with woman and we all die because of the inheritance of the congregations of Israel.

1Tim 2:14 25 Do not let water leak out or give free rein to a wicked woman. 26 If she does not do as you tell her, get rid of her.

Pro 31:10 **26** • 1 Happy the husband of a good wife, the number of his days will be doubled. 2 A woman of character is her husband's joy, he will live in peace all the years of his life.

3 A good wife is the best of gifts, reserved for those who fear the Lord; 4 rich or poor, he will have a serene heart and a happy face.

5 Three things disturb me and a fourth frightens me: neighborhood gossip, a rioting mob, a false accusation, all these are worse
Mt 7:16 than death. 6 But the woman jealous of another woman brings heartbreak, her tongue lashes out at everyone.

7 A bad wife is like a badly fixed yoke; taking her is like grasping a scorpion.

8 A drunken wife causes scandal; her disgrace will not remain hidden.

9 A licentious woman is noticed by her secretive looks and recognized by her lively eyes. 10 Keep a firm eye on a defiant daughter, so that she may not take advantage of some occasion.

11 Guard against the provocative woman and do not be surprised if she wishes to drag you into disgrace.

12 She opens her mouth like a thirsty traveler to drink any water coming her way; she sits by any pole and opens her quiver to every arrow.

Ecl 7:3-6 13 A wife's grace gladdens her husband and her prudence refreshes his body. 14 A wife who knows how to be silent is a gift from the Lord; the well-trained wife is invaluable. 15 A modest wife is a favor among favors; the chaste wife is priceless.

16 Like the sun rising over the mountains of the Lord, such is the enchantment of a good wife in a well-kept house.

17 Like the light which shines from the sacred lampstand, such is a beautiful face in a well-shaped body. 18 Like pillars of gold on a silver base, such are beautiful legs on sturdy feet. ( )

28 There are two things which grieve me and a third which makes me angry: a warrior who suffers want; intelligent men who are treated contemptuously; a man who turns from virtue to sin. The Lord singles this man out to strike him down.

29 The merchant can barely avoid greed; the shopkeeper cannot remain sinless.

27 1 Many sin for love of gain, he who desires riches silences his conscience.

2 Just as the stake is settled between two stones, so sin wedges itself between buying and selling. 3 The house of him who does not keep himself firmly in the fear of the Lord will soon be knocked to the ground.

4 When a sieve is shaken the dirt falls through; so, too, the defects of a man are seen when he begins to speak.

5 The kiln tests the potter's handiwork; a man is tested by his conversation.

6 A well-tended tree is shown by its fruits so a man's feelings can be detected in what he says.

7 Praise no one before he has spoken, since this is the acid test.

8 If you pursue righteousness, you will achieve it and wear it like a festive garment.

9 Birds associate with their own kind, so, too, does truth greet those who are faithful.

10 The lion lurks in wait for its prey; so, too, does sin lie in wait for those who do wrong.

11 The wise man's conversation follows wisdom all the time. In contrast, the fool changes like the moon.

12 When among fools, be sparing with your time; among thoughtful people, be lavish with it. 13 The conversation of fools is hateful, their laughter is coarse and raucous.

14 No one can bear those who swear all the time. Their quarrels make you cover your ears.

15 Blood is spilt when proud men quarrel and their insults are painful to the ear.

16 He who betrays a secret is no longer trusted; he will no longer find reliable friends. 17 Love your friend and be loyal; if you have revealed his secrets, go with him no longer.

• **26.**1 Ben Sira praises the perfect woman from a moral and physical viewpoint. With regard to this it would be necessary to show how the modern urban society is destructive of all those who are not in an independent situation. It is true for both man and woman, even if the latter does not know the slavery and endemic misery of Ben Sira's time. Today's cities offer an immense field of action for Christian family groups.

18 It is like having lost some of your relatives:
his friendship to you has died.
19 Like a bird, you have let your friend go,
you will not get him back. When you open
your hand, the bird flies off; 20 do not pursue
him: he is far away and has fled like a gazelle
from the snare. 21 For a wound can be ban-
daged and an insult forgiven, but if you betray
a secret there is no hope.
22 The man who winks an eye is plotting
evil, no one can persuade him to change.
23 He is all sweetness to your face, praising
your words, but behind your back he speaks
differently and twists your words.
24 I hate many things but nothing more
than this man; the Lord, also, hates and
curses him.
25 When one tosses a stone in the air it falls
back on his head; whoever deals a treacher-
ous blow, wounds himself.
26 He who digs a pit will fall into it; he who
sets a snare will be caught in it.
27 If you do evil, evil will befall you and you
will not know from where it comes.
28 The proud man makes use of mockery
and insults, but vengeance lies in wait for him
like a lion.
29 Those who gloat over the downfall of
good men will fall into the snare; suffering will
consume them before they die.
30 Grudge and wrath, these also are
abominations in which sinful people excel.

Don't bear grudges

28 1 He who demands revenge will
suffer the vengeance of the Lord
who keeps a strict account of his sins.
Mt 5:23-24 6:12 2 Forgive the mistakes of your neighbor
and you may ask that your sins be
forgiven.
3 If a man bears resentment against
another, how can he ask God for heal-
Mt 18:23-25 ing? 4 If he has no compassion on
others, how can he pray for forgiveness
for his sins? 5 As long as he, mere flesh,
is resentful, who will obtain his pardon?
6 Remember your end and give up
hatred; keep in mind your final corrup-
tion in the grave and keep the com-
Lev 19:17-18 Ex 23:4-5 mandments. 7 Remember the com-
mandments and do not bear grudges
against your neighbor. Remember the
covenant with the Most High and over-
look the offense.
8 Refrain from quarreling and you will
avoid sin; the hot-headed man sparks off
disputes.
9 The sinner causes trouble between
friends, sowing discord among peaceful
people.
10 Fire burns when fuel is thrown on it;
stubbornness drags out the discussion.
The more powerful the man, the greater
his rage; his anger will be in proportion to his
riches.
11 A sudden quarrel sparks off a fire; a
hasty dispute leads to bloodshed.
12 Blow on a spark and it ignites; spit on it
and it dies out: both come from your mouth.
13 Cursed be the gossiper with his spiteful Jas 3:1-12
tongue. He has destroyed many who lived
peacefully. 14 The vicious tongue has demol-
ished many and hounded them from nation to
nation. It has ruined powerful cities and laid
low great households.
15 The vicious tongue has cast out wives
who were beyond reproach, depriving them
of the fruit of their work. 16 Whoever listens to
it will never find rest or be able to live in peace.
17 The whip leaves a mark but the lash of
the tongue shatters bones.
18 Many have been felled by the sword but
many more have perished by the tongue.
19 Happy he who has escaped it and has
not been exposed to its fury, who has not
been weighed down by its yoke or been tied
up in its chains.
20 For it is a yoke of iron and its chains are
bronze. 21 It brings a miserable death. Actual
death is better! 22 But it will not tyrannize
those who keep faith, it will not consume their
soul.
23 Those who desert the Lord will be its
victims, it will burn them without being burnt
up itself; it will lunge at them like a lion, and
rip them apart like a leopard.
24 Look, you put a fence around your prop-
erty and protect your silver and gold. 25 In the
same way, make weights and scales for your
words and put a bolted door at your mouth.
26 Beware of a slip of the tongue when you
speak, lest you fall in front of those who lie in
wait for you.

29 • 1 Lending to your neighbor is an act
of mercy, going to his aid fulfills the
commandments.
2 Learn to lend to your neighbor when he is
in need and, in turn, repay him any loan on
time.

• **29.**1 29:2-6, this deals with those who ask for loans and do not pay back.
Alms and, in a broader sense, all that we do for others without charge is the best assurance against misfortune. On this subject see Tobit 4:9 and Luke 16:9.

3 Keep your word, remain faithful and you
will find what you need on every occasion.
4 Many think of a loan as a quick deal and
put those who help them in a fix.
5 The moment they receive it, they kiss the
hand of the moneylender and humble them-
selves in deference to his wealth. But on the
day repayment is due, they prolong the time,
repay with reproaches and blame the current
situation.
6 If they can repay, they pay barely half
and the moneylender will be grateful for that
much. They have robbed him of his money
and, moreover, he has gained enemies, for
they repay him with curses and insults and
reproaches instead of gratitude.
Tb 12:8-9 7 Many a good person refuses to lend, not
for any malicious reason: he is afraid of being
cheated without cause.
Mt 6:19-21 19:21 8 Nevertheless, be kind to those who have
fallen on hard times, do not keep them wait-
ing for your help.
9 For the commandments' sake, help the
poor man; see his need and do not turn him
away empty-handed.
Jas 5:3 10 Better to spend your money on a brother
or friend than to let it rust under a stone, to
your discredit.
11 Use your money according to the com-
mandments of the Most High and you will find
it more valuable than gold.
Tb 4:9-11 Lk 16:9 12 Fill your barns with good deeds and
these will rescue you from misfortune.
13 They will fight for you against your enemy
better than any strong shield and mighty
spear.
14 A good man goes surety for his neigh-
bor; the scoundrel leaves him to his fate.
15 Do not forget the favors of your guaran-
tor: he has risked his life for you.
16 The sinner wastes his guarantor's
money; the ungrateful man forgets the one
who saved him. 17 Acting as guarantor has
ruined many a good man and has tossed him
like the waves of the sea. 18 It has banished
powerful men and forced them to wander
among foreign nations.
19 The sinner is anxious to be a guarantor
but he will be condemned as a loan shark.
20 Help your neighbor as far as you can but
beware of falling into the same plight.
21 Some things you cannot live without:
water, bread, clothes and a house for shelter.
22 Better a poor man's life in his wooden
shack than lavish banquets in another man's
house.
23 Be content with whatever you have, be it
great or small; this is better than to go else-
where and be reproached as an outsider.
24 It is hard to go from house to house;
25 when you are an outsider, do not risk open-
ing your mouth. You will eat and drink without
much welcome and, on top of that, hear bitter
remarks: 26 "Come, stranger, set the table and
whatever you have, give it to me to eat."
27 "Be off, stranger, make room for some-
body more important; my brother is coming
to see me, I need the house."
28 It is hard for a good man to have hospi-
tality denied him and to be treated like a
debtor.

Correct your child

30 • 1 The man who loves his son
makes use of the rod; later on he
will be proud of him. 2 The man who
corrects his son will reap the benefit
and be proud of him among his ac-
quaintances. 3 By instructing his son he
makes his enemy envious; he will be
well pleased with him in the company
of his friends.
4 If such a father dies it is as if he Tb 9:6
had not died, for he leaves behind him
another man like himself. 5 In life he had
the joy of his company and he is not
sorrowful when death comes.
6 He leaves it to his family to take
revenge on his enemies and to return
gifts to his friends.
7 The man who coddles his son will
be constantly bandaging his wounds; at
his every cry he will be troubled.
8 Just as a badly broken-in horse
cannot be mounted, so a spoiled son
becomes insolent. 9 Pamper your child
and later he will terrify you; play with
him and he will bring you sorrow.
10 Do not laugh at him lest you have

• **30.**1 Here Ben Sira touches a point on which the destiny of a people depends. Everyone complains that there are few responsible people. We experience good intentions everywhere, but where are the people who can persevere in doing good and carry out their good intentions? The major cause of a lack of maturity in willpower is found in the total lack of parental authority. A three-month-old baby knows that if he keeps crying he will force the mother to pick him up. When he is two years old, a child knows how to threaten, scream, have a tantrum, with the assurance that, in the end, his parents will give in: "What can we do? The child does not want it."

Ben Sira knows that only children who are subject to discipline and whose whims are not satisfied by their parents, only they will come to real freedom, because they are able to persevere in doing good.

Christianity, of course, is not founded on the

to suffer and grind your teeth. 11 Do not
let him be independent as a child, 12 but
rather bruise his ribs while he is still
young, lest he grow stubborn and re-
fuse to obey.

13 Be strict with your son and perse-
vere in this, so as not to suffer because
of his misconduct.

14 Better a poor man healthy and fit, than
a rich man tormented in body.
15 Health and vigor are worth more than
gold, a robust body, more than great wealth.
16 No riches are preferable to physical well-
being, and no joy is greater than a cheerful
heart.
Job 7:13 17 Death is better than a wretched life and
eternal rest preferable to lasting sickness.
18 Dishes of food placed on an empty tomb
are like good things offered to one who can-
not eat.
19 What good is a sacrifice offered to an
idol? It can neither eat nor smell. So is it with
the one whom the Lord has stricken; 20 he
sees with his eyes and groans, like a eunuch
embracing a virgin and sighing.
21 Do not give yourself over to sadness or
torment yourself with brooding.
22 Joy of heart is life to a man; gladness
gives him length of days.
23 Delight your soul and console your
heart; chase sorrow far away, for sorrow has
destroyed many and never did good to any-
one.
24 Jealousy and anger shorten your life;
worry makes you old before the time.
Pro 15:15 25 A cheerful and kindly person will have a
good appetite and enjoy his food.

31 1 The sleeplessness that wealth brings
makes a man lose weight; his worries
drive sleep away.
2 The cares of the day prevent sleep; in the
same way, serious illness makes rest impos-
sible.

Happy the one who doesn't go after gold

3 The rich man toils to increase his
wealth and then sits back and lives in
luxury; 4 the poor man toils to survive
and is in want as soon as he leaves off.
5 He who loves gold cannot be right-
eous; whoever runs after gain will be
led astray. 6 Many have been ruined be-
cause of gold; disgrace went to meet
them.
7 Gold is a snare for those who are
possessed by love of it. The senseless
will be caught in it.
8 Happy is the rich man who has not
sinned in this way and has not gone
after gold! 9 Who is he? Let us say:
Fortunate man! For he has given a
wonderful example.
10 Who has been tested in this and
found perfect? He has reason to be
proud. Who could have sinned but re-
sisted, who could have done wrong and
did not do it? 11 His fortune is firmly
established and the assembly will ac-
knowledge his generosity.

Dinner parties

• 12 Are you seated at a lavish banquet?
Don't be over-ready to eat and don't say,
"What a feast!"
13 Remember that a greedy eye is an evil
thing. What is worse than such an eye? That
is why it was condemned to weep.
14 Do not stretch out your hand to every-
thing you see or be quick in reaching for a
dish. 15 Judge the needs of your fellow guest
by your own and in all things act prudently.
16 Eat what is set before you like an edu-
cated person and don't be a glutton, lest you
be detested.
17 Like a well-mannered man, be the first
to stop; don't be voracious if you are to avoid
difficulties. 18 If important people are present,
do not be the first to serve yourself.
19 A little is sufficient for a well-bred per-
son; your breathing moreover will be easier
when you go to bed. 20 Healthy sleeping is for
the moderate eater. He rises early and feels
fit! Sleeplessness and stomach trouble attend
the overindulgent. 21 If you are obliged to eat
too much, go off and vomit and you will be at
ease.
22 Listen to me, my friend, and do not
neglect what I say; in the end you will see the
truth of it. Be moderate in all that you do and
you will be without illness.

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observance of law. Yet, though every believer may experience something of the "spirit," we will have trouble reaping its fruits if we are not disciplined.

• **31.**12 The Bible does not condemn the use of wine: it was made for our delight (see Ps 104:15). Only those consecrated as nazirs abstain from wine. The New Testament will not condemn wine either: such is the meaning of Jesus' first miracle in Cana (Jn 2).

Nevertheless, the books of Wisdom have many warnings against drunkenness. See what Paul has to say in Eph 5:18 and 1 Cor 5:11.

23 A generous host is appreciated: he is
justly praised, 24 but everyone will complain
about a stingy host and their complaints will
be justified.
25 Do not try to show how much wine you
can take, for wine has been the ruin of many.
26 As the furnace tests the temper of steel, so
wine proves hearts and makes proud men
quarrel.
1Tim 5:23 27 Wine is life for man if taken in moderation. What is life without wine? 28 Wine makes
for a glad heart and a cheerful mind, if taken
moderately and at the right time. 29 But if
taken to excess it brings bitterness of soul,
excitement and a fumbling step.
30 Drunkenness inflames the anger of a
stupid person to the point of scandal. It reduces his strength and brings him blows.
31 Do not reproach a neighbor during a wine
feast, and don't look down on him when he is
merry; do not speak harshly to him or annoy
him by asking him to settle a debt.

32 1 Have you been chosen to preside at
a party? Don't give yourself airs! Just
be like everyone else in the group; see to their
needs and then sit down. 2 When you have
done what you should, take your place and
enjoy yourself with the others. They will congratulate you for a job well done.
3 If you are older, speak as befits your age,
but know what you are talking about and do
not interrupt the music.
4 If there is a concert, refrain from speaking; it is not the time for playing the wise man.
5 A musical concert at a wine banquet is like
a ruby set in gold. 6 As an emerald signet set
in a work of gold, so is the music with good
wine.
7 If you are young, speak if you have to, but
not more than twice and only if requested.
8 Keep to the point and say it all in a few
words. Show that you are well informed but
not over-anxious to speak.
9 Do not try to be the equal of eminent
people and do not chat when someone else is
speaking.
10 As lightning goes before thunder, the
reputation of a modest man goes before him.
11 Leave the party at the right time and do
not be slow about it; no lingering, go straight
home!
12 There you may relax and do as you
please, but do not sin by bragging.
13 And thank your Creator for the enjoyment of all good things.
14 Whoever fears the Lord will accept his
correction, and those who rise at dawn will
win his favor.
15 The man who follows his Law will be
nourished by it, but the hypocrite will find it a
stumbling block.
16 Those who fear the Lord will please him
and their good deeds will shine as a light.
17 The sinner refuses correction and excuses himself for doing what he wants.
18 A person of judgment reflects beforehand; the stubborn and proud man goes
ahead without worrying about anything.
19 Never act without first reflecting, and
you will have no regrets.
20 Do not go along a rough road lest you
stumble on stones. 21 And do not be too sure
of your step on a smooth path. 22 Beware even
of your own children.
23 Be careful in whatever you do. In so
doing you keep the commandments.
24 Those who trust in the Law will keep the
commandments and those who obey the
Lord will come to no harm.

33 1 Evil will not go to meet the one who
fears the Lord; if he is in danger he will
be rescued.
2 The wise man never departs from the
Law; he who only pretends to keep it is like a
storm-tossed boat.
3 An intelligent man has faith in the Law, 1S 14:41 1Mac 3:48
which for him is as trustworthy as an oracle.
4 If you want people to listen to you, prepare what you have to say; recall what you
have learned before you give an answer. 5 A
cart wheel! That is what the feelings of a fool
are like. His mind resembles a turning axle.
6 A mocking friend is like a wild horse,
neighing when anyone rides him.
7 Why is one day holier than another, when
the light of the sun shines on every day of the
year? 8 By the Lord's decision they were
made different; he arranged the different seasons and feasts.
9 Some of these he chose to make holy,
others he made ordinary days. 10 All human
beings come from clay just as Adam himself
was formed. 11 In the fullness of his wisdom
the Lord made each one unique and diversified his conditions.
12 Some he made holy, keeping them near 1S 2:6-8 Lk 1:51-53
to himself. Others he cursed and humiliated,
removing them from where they were.
13 As clay in the hand of the potter to be Is 29:16 Rom 9:21
molded as he pleases, so are all in the hands
of the Creator to be dealt with as he sees fit.
14 Good is the opposite of evil, and life, of
death, and the sinner is the opposite of the
upright. 15 Consider all the works of the Most 42:24-25 Ecl 3:1-8
High and you will see how they go in pairs, by
opposites.
16 As for me I have been the last to keep
watch, like a gleaner following the grape-
pickers. 17 By the blessing of the Lord I have
taken the lead and like the grape-picker I
have filled the winepress. 18 Note that not only
for myself have I toiled, but for all who seek
instruction. 19 Hear me, rulers of the people,
leaders of the assembly hear!
20 Neither to son, wife, brother nor friend
give power over yourself during your life. Do

not give your property to another in case you regret it and have to beg them to return it.

21 As long as you live and there is breath in you, do not give power over yourself to anyone. 22 It is preferable for your children to be dependent on you, than that you be obliged to depend on them. 23 Be master of all that you do; let not others stain your reputation.

24 Wait until the end of your days, until death is near, to distribute your inheritance.

Your slaves

Pro 26:3

25 Fodder, stick and burdens are for the donkey; bread, correction and work are for the slave.

26 Put your slave to work and you will have peace. Let him take it easy and he will want to be free. 27 Yoke and harness will bow the neck. For a criminal slave there are torture and the stocks.

28 Send him to work or he will be idle, and idleness teaches much evil. 29 Give him work that is appropriate for him; if he does not obey, put his feet in chains.

30 But do not be over-demanding with anyone and do nothing without discernment.

31 You have a slave? Let him be like you; for you bought him through blood.

32 You have a slave? Treat him like a brother. You need him as you need yourself. 33 If you ill-treat him and he escapes, where will you go to look for him?

Dreams

34 • 1 The foolish are deceived by vain and false hopes; dreams give them wings.

2 To rely on dreams is like grasping a shadow or chasing the wind. 3 What you see in dreams are only reflections: a person sees his own image.

Job 14:4

4 What clean thing can come from what is unclean? What truth comes

Ecl 5:5-6

from what is false? 5 Divinations, omens and dreams are empty like the fantasies of a woman in labor.

6 Unless they come as messengers of the Most High, do not pay attention to them. 7 For dreams have led many people astray. Those who hoped in them have fallen.

8 Not so the Law, which never fails but comes true. Wisdom from the truthful lips of God is the highest truth.

9 One who has traveled knows a great deal, and a man of wide experience will talk soundly. 10 A person who has not had trials knows very little. But the traveled man is competent in many ways. 11 I have made many discoveries on my travels and understood more than I can express. 12 I have often been in danger of death but have been saved thanks to my experience.

13 The spirit of those who fear the Lord will live, for their hope is placed in the One who saves.

14 He who fears the Lord is in dread of nothing. He will not be cowardly for he is his hope. 15 He who fears the Lord is a happy person. To whom does he turn? Who is his support?

Ps 33:18 34:16

16 The eyes of the Lord are on those who love him. For them he is powerful protection, strong support, shelter against scorching wind and the midday sun. He is a safeguard against stumbling and assurance against a fall. 17 He lifts up the soul and gives a sparkle to the eyes; he gives healing, life and blessing.

Offerings pleasing to God

• 18 An offering to God from stolen goods is a stained offering, the sacrifices of the wicked do not please God.

Is 1:11 Am 5:21 Ps 50:8

19 The Most High takes no pleasure in the offering of the godless. It is not the number of victims that obtains pardon for sin.

20 Offering to God from what belongs to the poor is like slaughtering a son in the presence of his father.

Lev 19:13 Jer 22:13

21 Bread is life to the poor; he who takes it from them is a murderer. 22 He who deprives others of a livelihood kills them, and whoever withdraws the salary of a worker is guilty of blood.

23 If one builds and the other destroys, what do they gain besides trouble? 24 If one prays and the other curses, whose voice will the Master listen to?

• **34.**1 Previously in Israel, dreams were very important. Here we have a reaction against dreams. Without denying that, in some cases, God can guide or warn the believer through a dream, the author teaches that we must not be guided by dreams: the sure way is to fulfill God's Law (see commentary on Gen 37).

• 18. What infuriates the sacred author is that after they have stripped the humble, the rich come to the Temple to offer their magnificent presents.

25 If a man is cleansed after touching
a corpse and then touches it again,
what good was there in his cleansing?
26 If anyone fasts for his sins and then
commits the same sins, who will hear
his prayer? What value is there in his
fasting?

35 1 Keeping the Law is worth many
offerings. Being faithful to the
commandments is is like a peace offer-
ing.
Lev 2:1 2 Returning kindness is an offering of
fine flour; giving alms is a sacrifice of
praise.
Lev 16:1 3 Renouncing sin pleases the Lord,
and shunning injustice is a sacrifice of
atonement.
4 Do not appear before the Lord with
empty hands. The commandment re-
quires that you bring an offering.
5 When the offering of the righteous
is burned on the altar, the fat drips
down and a fragrant aroma rises to the
Most High.
Lev 2:1-3 6 The sacrifice of the just man
pleases God and will not be forgotten.
Dt 26:1 7 Honor the Lord with a generous heart
and do not be stingy with the first fruits
of your harvest.
Dt 14:22 2Cor 9:7 8 Offer your gifts with a smiling face
and when you pay your tithes do it
gladly.

The Lord will not delay

• 9 Give to the Most High as he has
given to you; give generously to the
Lord according to what you have; 10 the
Lord will repay, he will reward you
sevenfold.
11 If you attempt to bribe him with
gifts he will not accept them; do not rely
on offerings from dishonest gain.
Dt 10:17 12 The Lord is judge and shows no
partiality. 13 He will not disadvantage
the poor, he who hears the prayer of the
oppressed. 14 He does not disdain the
Ex 22:21 Pro 23:10-11 plea of the orphan, nor the complaint of
the widow.
15 When tears flow down her cheeks,
is she not crying out against the one
who caused her to weep?
16 The one who serves God whole-
heartedly will be heard; his petition will
Job 16:18 reach the clouds. 17 The prayer of the
humble person pierces the clouds, and
he is not consoled until he has been
heard. 18 His prayer will not cease until
the Most High has looked down, until
justice has been done in favor of the
righteous.
19 And the Lord will not delay, nor will
he be patient with the wicked, 20 but he
will crush the backbone of the merci-
less and have vengeance on the na-
tions, 21 until he has completely de-
stroyed the hordes of the violent and
broken the power of the wicked, 22 until
he has repaid each one according to his
deeds, 23 until he has judged his people
and made them rejoice because of his
mercy.
24 Blessed is his mercy in the time of
adversity! It is like rain clouds during a
drought!

Prayer for the deliverance of Israel

36 • 1 Have mercy on us, Master,
Ps 79 Jer 10:25 God of all, and look on us; make
every nation stand in fear of you.
2 Take action against the pagan na-
tions and let them see your power. 3 You

• **35.**9 We must generously assist in the cost of worship as long as it is not a way of forgetting our responsibilities concerning injustice in our world. The Lord is pleased with our sacrifices but, above all, he hears the prayer of the orphan and sees the tears of the widow.

• **36.**1 The author shares the ideas of his contemporaries who think only of the salvation of the world through the salvation of the Jewish people. He believes in the promises of the prophets: God will do justice and will gather together the dispersed children of Israel.
This hope has always been the strength of the Jewish people. After Christ the Jews were dispersed as the Gospel foretold. Counting on God's promises and the certitude of their unique vocation they were often able to resist dispersion and assimilation.
The New Testament shows us that all of God's promises to his people have been fulfilled in Jesus. It is on the basis of this certitude

Ezk 38:22-23 have shown them your holiness through what happened to us, so now let us see your great power in acting among them.

1K 8:43 Is 45:14 [4] Let them acknowledge, as we have acknowledged, that there is no God but you, Lord.

[5] Give new signs, do fresh wonders, stretch out your hand and be glorified in your strength.

[6] Kindle your fury and rouse your anger, destroy your opponents, crush your enemy.

[7] Hasten the day, remember your covenant so that we may speak of your great deeds. [8] Let the survivors be consumed in fiery wrath, let those who oppress send to perdition. [9] Crush the heads of hostile rulers – those who say they alone count.

[10] Gather all the tribes of Jacob, give them back their inheritance as in the beginning.

Ex 4:22 [11] Have pity, Lord, on the people known by your Name, on Israel whom you called your firstborn.

2S 5:9 [12] Show compassion to the holy city, to Jerusalem where you rest.

[13] Fill Zion with the fame of your wonders, and your people with your glory.

[14] Confirm the promises made to your people long ago and fulfill the promises made in your name.

[15] Reward those who wait for you and fulfill the words of your prophets.

Num 6:22-27 [16] Hear the prayer of your servants, Lord; hear your priests giving Aaron's blessing to your people.

[17] So that all on earth may acknowledge that you are Lord and everlasting God.

Choosing a wife

[18] The stomach takes in all kinds of food but one food is better than another.

[19] Just as the tongue can distinguish the flavor of game, so does the alert mind detect lies.

[20] A crooked heart causes sorrow, but an experienced person knows how to get even with him.

[21] A woman will accept any husband but some daughters are better than others. Pro 5:15-19

[22] Woman's beauty rejoices people and is beyond all that could be wished for.

[23] If she is kindly-spoken and gentle he is the most fortunate of men. Pro 15:4

[24] When a man marries he acquires a fortune, someone who understands him and who will help and support him.

[25] When there is no hedge the property will be destroyed; and when a man has no wife he is a fretful wanderer.

[26] Who would trust a clever robber flitting from town to town? [27] And who would trust a man without a nest, who lodges wherever nightfall finds him?

Friends and counselors

37 [1] Every friend says, "I am your friend, too," but some friends are only friends in name. 6:5-17 Pro 2:6

[2] Is it not a deadly grief when a companion or friend turns into an enemy?

[3] O evil intention! From where have you sprung, to cover the earth with deceit?

[4] One kind of comrade takes advantage of his friend's good fortune; in time of trouble he turns against him. [5] Another kind shares his friend's suffering, for the sake of a meal; when it comes to a fight, he thinks only of saving himself.

[6] Do not neglect a friend or forget him once you are wealthy.

[7] All advisers give advice but some seek only their own gain.

[8] Distrust the person who offers advice, lest he take advantage of you; first of all, ask yourself what he lacks, and what his own interest suggests to him.

[9] Perhaps he says to you, "You are on the right road," while he keeps his distance, to see what happens to you.

[10] Do not seek advice from one who looks at you suspiciously; hide your plans from those who envy you.

[11] Do not consult a woman about her rival, or a coward about war, or a merchant about exchange rates, or a buyer about selling, or a jealous man about gratitude, or a selfish person about generosity, or an idler about any kind of work, or a casual worker about finishing a job, or a lazy servant about an

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that we must re-evaluate the words of God. At first they all seemed centered on the gift to Israel of material land within the limits of Palestine. The prophets show that things were not so simple, and Jesus teaches his apostles that salvation history is a process of deaths and resurrections.

important task. Do not rely on these people for any advice.
12 But go to a trustworthy man whom you know to be a keeper of the commandments, whose soul reflects your own and who will suffer with you, if you fail.
13 In the end, keep to your own heart's advice, since no one deserves to be trusted more than your heart.
14 For a man's soul often gives better advice than seven watchmen placed on a height.
Pro 16:9 15 Besides all this, implore the Almighty to guide your steps in the truth.
16 A plan must be at the beginning of all work; reflection comes before every action.
Pro 18:21 17 When you decide, four ways are open before you: 18 good, evil, life and death. Your own decision makes the choice.
19 A clever man may teach many but do no good for himself.
20 A man may be wise, but if his words are rejected he will end up starving,
21 not having won the favor of the Lord and being destitute of all wisdom.
22 Another man is wise for himself. He himself takes advantage of his wisdom.
23 The truly wise man teaches his people, and they benefit by his knowledge.
24 The wise man is full of blessings; those who see him call him happy.
25 Man's days are numbered but Israel's days are countless.
26 The wise man will win the confidence of his people; his name will live forever.
1Cor 3:2 6:12 Heb 5:12 27 My son, test yourself during the course of your life; see what is harmful and avoid it.
28 For everything does not suit everybody, nor is everyone satisfied with all things.
29 Do not be insatiable in every pleasure, or be excessive in what you eat; 30 for overeating leads to sickness and gluttony brings indigestion. 31 Many have died because of gluttony; he who takes care prolongs his life.

The doctor

38 • 1 Give due honor to the doctor, for you need him and God himself established him.
2 Healing, in fact, comes from the Most High; the gift of healing comes from the Sovereign.
3 The doctor's expertise gives him prestige and wins for him the admiration of the powerful.
4 The Lord created the medicinal herbs which grow on the earth, and these a sensible person will not despise.
Ex 15:23-25 5 Remember that he used a simple wooden rod to purify water and so make known his power to everyone.
6 It is he who gives knowledge to humans so that his power be glorified;
7 the doctor uses it to heal and comfort, the chemist to make his mixtures. 8 In that way the Lord's work never ceases and well-being prevails on the earth.
9 My son, when you are sick do not be anxious; pray to the Lord to heal you. 10 Give up bad habits, keep your hands unsoiled, and purify your heart from all sin.
11 Offer incense and a memorial gift of fine flour and rich offerings according to your means. 12 Then consult the doctor; remember that he was established by the Lord, so do not disregard him – you need him. 13 There are cases when good health depends on doctors.
14 They, too, will pray to the Most High to grant them success in healing in order to save life.
15 May he who sins before his Maker, fall into the hands of the doctor!

Grieving

Jer 9:17 Ezk 24:15 Mk 5:38 16 My son, weep for the dead, lament to express your sorrow and bury the dead with fitting ceremony, and do not fail to honor his tomb.
17 Weep bitterly, cry out with full voice, and observe the period of mourning in accordance with the merits of the deceased. Let it be for one or two days, and so avoid criticism, and then be consoled in your grief.
18 For sorrow may lead to death and a dejected heart loses its vitality.
19 Let your affliction cease with the funeral; a life of sorrow is intolerable.
20 Do not let your heart give way to grief; bear up and think of your own end.
21 Remember! There is no coming back, you do the dead no good, but rather harm yourself.
22 Keep in mind my sentence which will be yours as well: mine yesterday, yours today!

• **38.**1 We must pray to be healed of a disease, but without neglecting the help of doctors as some people do. This is clearly stated in the Bible.

23 When the dead person is at rest, let his
memory be one of peace; be comforted on his
account once his spirit has departed.

Craftsmen and wise men

24 A law student acquires wisdom during
his leisure hours; free from business he is
capable of becoming wise.
25 How can the man who guides a plow
become wise, he whose pride lies in snap-
ping a whip and driving a bullock, who works
continually and talks of nothing but cattle?
26 His heart is set on plowing furrows and all
his attention is given to fattening heifers.
27 It is the same for all craftsmen and
skilled workers who toil day and night, pro-
fessional engravers and designers of seals.
All are intent on creating different designs
and reproducing the model, and they work
even at night in order to succeed.
28 So, too, is the smith standing beside the
anvil intent on forging iron; his face is
scorched by flames from the fire and he
struggles in the heat of the furnace; the clang
of the hammer is deafening; his eyes are fixed
on the model to be copied, he makes every
effort to work well and spends time at night in
bringing his task to perfection.
29 It is the same for the potter seated at his
work, his foot turning the wheel, always con-
centrating on what he is molding, every
movement purposefully controlled. 30 His
arm kneads the clay, his feet make it pliable.
All his attention is needed in applying the
glaze and at night he sees to the cleaning of
the furnace.
31 All these craftsmen depend on their
hands for gaining skill in their different crafts.
32 Without them a city could not be built; no
settlers or travelers would come to it.
33 But they are not to be found in the
councils of people, nor do their words carry
weight in an assembly. They do not occupy
the judge's seat and they are not familiar with
the Law.
34 They are not cultured people or skilled in
judgment and they are not found among
authors of proverbs.
They uphold creation and civilization, and
their prayer is in their life's work.

Ps 1:2 **39** 1 Quite different is it with the person
who spends his life reflecting on the
Law of the Most High. He examines the wis-
dom of the sages in times past and in his free
time he studies prophecies.
2 He keeps in mind what people of renown
have said and penetrates the mystery of
parables. 3 He searches for the inner meaning
of proverbs and is interested in the secret of
parables.
4 He is at the service of the great and is
seen in the company of leaders. He travels in
foreign lands and has experience of both the
good and the evil in mankind.
5 Early in the morning his heart is set on
turning to the Lord, his Maker, and raising his
being to the Most High. He opens his mouth
in prayer and makes supplication because of
his sins.
6 If such is the will of the great Lord he will Is 11:2
be filled with the spirit of discernment. He will
then speak words of wisdom and celebrate
the Lord in prayer.
7 He will acquire just judgment and knowl-
edge and reflect on the Lord's hidden mysteries.
8 In his teaching he discloses what he has
learned and glories in the law of the Lord's
covenant.
9 Many people praise his discernment and
never will he be forgotten. His memory will
not fade and his name will live on from
generation to generation.
10 Nations will proclaim his wisdom and
the assembly will celebrate his praise.
11 As long as he lives his name will be more
glorious than a thousand others, and when he
dies that fame will be enough.

All creation is good

12 I wish to share still more of my reflec-
tions; I am filled with them just as the moon
is said to be full.
13 Hear me, devoted people, and grow as a
rose planted near a stream.
14 Spread fragrance around you like in-
cense; blossom and perfume the air like a lily;
sing a hymn and bless Yahweh for all his
works.
15 Magnify his Name and proclaim his
praise with song and lyre, expressing this
with thanksgiving.
16 How magnificent are the works of the
Lord! All his commands are appropriately
timed and satisfy every need.
No one should say: "What is this? Why is
that?" All must be studied in its time.
17 At his word the waters ceased to flow
and piled up, his voice caused the reservoir of
water to open; 18 at his order his every wish is Wis 1:7
fulfilled, and no one hinders his work of
salvation.
19 The deeds of all are before him, nothing
is hidden from his eyes; 20 he sees all from
eternity to eternity and nothing surprises him.
21 No one must say: "What is that? Why is
it so?" for everything is created for a purpose.
22 His blessing covers all things and like a
river drenches the land as in a flood. 23 Simi- Gen 19:24
larly he may pour out his wrath on the na- Ps 107: 33
tions, just as he has turned fresh water into
salt.
24 If his ways are smooth for holy people
they are full of obstacles for the wicked.
25 From the beginning, good things have been

created for the good and likewise evil things for the wicked.

[26] Most necessary for man's life are water, fire, iron and salt, wheaten flour, milk, honey, the juice of the grape, oil and clothing.

[27] All these are good for those who are good, but for sinners they become evil.

[28] Certain winds are created as a means of punishment and in their fury they are a scourge, unleashing their violence in the time of destruction and satisfying the wrath of their Creator.

[29] Fire, hail, famine and death have all been created for punishment.

[30] The fangs of wild beasts, scorpions, vipers and the avenging sword for the destruction of the wicked, [31] all joyfully carry out his commands, all are ready when need arises and at a given moment they will not fail to obey his word.

[32] For that reason I reflected and from the beginning I decided to write:

[33] All the works of the Lord are good and he will satisfy every need in due time.

[34] You must not say: This is less good than that, for in its time everything will serve a purpose.

[35] So now, with all your heart and in full voice, sing and bless the Name of the Lord.

The misery of human life

Job 7:1 14:1-2

40 [1] Painful is the lot of all humans, a heavy yoke is upon the sons of Adam from the day they leave their mother's womb to the day they return to the mother of us all.

[2] What is on their mind, what they fear in their heart, is the day of their death. [3] From the king, glorious on his throne, robed in purple and wearing a crown, [4] to the lowliest person sitting in dust and ashes and covered with sackcloth, there is anger, envy, trouble and unrest, fear of death, rivalry and quarrels.

Job 7:4

Ecl 2:23 8:16

[5] And at night when we lie down we have fresh worries: [6] scarcely are we at rest and asleep when we are troubled by dreams as vivid as if it were day and we were fleeing from a battle. [7] When it is time to wake up, we feel surprised to find that there is nothing to fear.

[8] This is the fate of every living creature, man and beast, but for sinners it is seven times worse, [9] in death, bloodshed, strife, sword, misfortune, famine, affliction and calamity.

[10] All these were created for the wicked, and the flood as well was sent on their account.

Ecl 1:7

[11] Everything that comes from the earth goes back to the earth, and what comes from the waters returns to the sea.

[12] All bribery, all injustice will disappear but good faith will last forever.

[13] The unjust riches will vanish like a stream that dries up; they will crash like a clap of thunder during a downpour.

[14] A generous man has reason to rejoice, whereas sinners go to their ruin.

[15] The children of the ungodly will not be blessed with large families; they are like plants taking root on sheer rock, [16] like reeds in water and along the river bank, withering sooner than other plants.

[17] Kindness is like a garden of blessings and charity endures forever.

[18] Life is pleasant both for an independent person and a self-reliant worker, but still better off is the one who finds a treasure.

[19] The name of a man who has children or who has established a town will live on, but to have found wisdom is a greater good.

Owning cattle and plantations brings fame, but a perfect wife is a richer blessing.

[20] Wine and music gladden the heart, but better still is the love of wisdom.

[21] The flute and harp make fine music, but even more appreciated is a pleasant voice.

[22] Gracefulness and beauty delight the eye, but not as much as the fresh growth of fields.

[23] It is always good for friends and companions to meet, better still for husband and wife.

[24] Brothers and protectors are useful in hard times, but it will be of greater help to have been a giver of alms.

[25] Gold and silver make for security but good advice is better.

[26] Wealth and strength give confidence, but good counsel is more esteemed than either.

You cannot suffer loss when you fear the Lord, with it you have all the support you need.

[27] The fear of the Lord is like a garden of blessings; it clothes a person better than any glory.

[28] My son, do not live the life of a beggar; it would be better to die than to beg.

[29] When a man is always eyeing another's table, it cannot be said that he is really living, for he is defiling himself with another's food; an intelligent and educated man will avoid this.

[30] That for which a shameless man begs may seem sweet to his mouth but his inner being is burning.

Death

41 [1] Death! What a bitter thought for someone who lives happily

among his possessions, a prosperous and successful man who is still able to enjoy his food!

2 Your sentence, Death, is welcome to a needy person whose strength is failing, who is old, worn out, and full of worries; to one who is angry and without hope!

3 Do not be afraid of Death's sentence; think of those who have gone before you and those who will follow.
Ecl 6:6 9:10 4 The Lord has decreed it for every living creature; why should you rebel against the good pleasure of the Most High?

Whether you live for ten, a hundred or a thousand years, no one in the netherworld is concerned.

5 Abominable people, such are the children of sinners who gather in the houses of the ungodly.

6 The inheritance of sinners will perish; their prosperity will be a lasting reproach.

7 An ungodly father will be insulted by his children, for they hold him responsible for their disgrace.

8 Woe to you, wicked people who have forsaken the law of the Most High!
9 At birth you are born to be cursed and you will be cursed at death.

10 All that comes from the earth returns to the earth, and the ungodly go from curse to ruin.

11 People grieve because their bodies will perish, but even the evil names of sinners will be blotted out.

Ecl 7:1 12 Have regard for your reputation, for it will live on, of greater value than a thousand hoards of gold. 13 Few perhaps are the days of the just man's life but an honored name endures forever.

True and false shame

20:30-31 Mt 5:14-16 14 My children, keep my teaching and live in peace. Of what use is hidden wisdom and unseen treasure?

15 It is better for a man to hide his foolishness than to hide his wisdom.

16 Therefore, feel shame according to what I say. It is not always fitting to feel shame, but this is not understood by everyone.

17 Be ashamed of licentiousness before your father and mother, and of a lie before a ruler or an important person.

18 Be ashamed of criminal behavior before a judge, and of iniquity before an assembly of people.

19 Feel ashamed of dishonesty before your partner or friend, and of a theft in the place where you live.

20 Be ashamed before the truth of God and his covenant. Be ashamed of keeping the loaves for yourself, 21 of being unable to give and to receive, of not returning a greeting,

22 of staring at a prostitute,
of rejecting a compatriot,

23 of depriving someone of what is his,
of gazing at another man's wife,

24 of being too familiar with your maidservant – keep away from her bed!

25 of insulting words to a friend –
do not follow up a gift with a reproach!

26 of repeating what you have heard and betraying secrets.

27 On these occasions feel genuine shame and you will be respected by all.

42 1 But do not let yourself be led astray by any of the things that follow. 2 Do not be ashamed

of the law of the Most High and his covenant,
of judging even the wicked fairly,

3 of keeping accounts with a traveling companion,
and of sharing your inheritance with friends,

4 of checking weights and scales, 5 of making a profit whether small or great,
of bargaining with traders, and of being strict with children,
of severe corporal punishment for a servant who deserves it.

6 With a prying wife or when many people are around, it is wise to make use of seal and lock!

7 For deposits it is essential to reckon by number and weight and keep a written record of what you give and receive.

8 Do not be ashamed of correcting someone who is foolish or stupid or an old man who has become childish.

Doing that, you prove that you are a well-educated person and you will be generally respected.

• 9 A daughter causes her father hidden worries; anxiety on her account keeps him awake: Dt 24:1

• **42.**9 Sirach's original text, written in Hebrew, was much longer in verse 9 and said: "Her room should have no windows and she should not be able to see the entrances to the house." Such advice is one more proof of the male domination in Hebrew culture which the Greek

Is she young? She may not marry. Is she married? She may be disliked;

10 Is she a virgin? She may be seduced and become pregnant in her father's house!

Is she married? She may be unfaithful or unable to have children!

11 Your daughter is unruly? Watch her well, or she may make you a laughingstock to your enemies, the talk of the town and a public disgrace.

12 Do not be taken by human beauty and do not sit down in the company of women;
13 for just as a moth comes out of a garment, woman's wickedness comes out of a woman. Ecl 7:26-28

14 Better a man's wickedness than a woman's kindness; women bring shame and disgrace.

SECOND PART: GOD'S WISDOM IN HISTORY

Wonders of nature

Gen 1:3 • 15 Now I shall remind you of the works of the Lord and relate what I have seen.

The Lord's works depend on his word, and creation obeys his will.

16 The sun shines on everything and the work of the Lord is filled with his glory.

17 Not even to his holy ones has the Lord given full knowledge of all his marvelous works.

The Lord, Master of the universe, has ordained that all should stand firm in his glory.

18 He penetrates both the depth of the abyss and the human heart and knows their secrets.

For the Most High has full knowledge and ordains the signs of the heavens.

19 He knows the past and foretells the future and reveals the traces of the world's mysteries.

Ps 139:1-4 20 No thought escapes him, no word is hidden from him.

21 He has ordered the marvelous works of his wisdom, from ever and for ever. Nothing Ecl 3:14 can be added, nothing can be taken away and he has no need of counsel.

22 All his works are beautiful, even to the smallest spark of light.

23 All this lives and endures forever: all is useful and obedient to his will.

Ecl 3:1-8 24 All things are in pairs, one opposite the other, and nothing he makes is in any way deficient.

25 One thing emphasizes the excellence of the other; who could ever weary of admiring his glory?

43 1 The pride of the heights above is the clear firmament. How glorious is the spectacle of the heavens! Ps 19:1-6

2 When the sun rises and appears, it proclaims: "I am your marvelous work, Most High!" Ps 8:4

3 At noon, it dries up the land; who can bear its burning heat?

4 You may stoke a furnace to produce heat, but three times greater is the heat of the sun burning the mountains, and sending out fiery vapors, blinding the eyes with its rays.

5 How great is the Lord who made it and whose word directs its rapid course!

6 He also made the moon, exact in marking the months and the passage of time.
7 With its full light gradually decreasing, the moon determines and rules over the feast days. Gen 1:14-18 8 The month also takes its name from the moon. How marvelously does it increase Ps 89:38 104:19 in its phases, providing a signal for the heavenly hosts, brightly shining in the expanse of the sky!

9 The bright radiance of the stars accounts for the beauty of the sky. What a brilliant ornament they are for the heights of the Lord!

10 At the command of the All Holy they stand as appointed and never fail to keep watch. Bar 3:35

11 Look at the rainbow and praise the One who made it. How magnificent it is in splendor! Gen 9:13 Ezk 1:28

12 It forms a circle of glory in the sky, a bow that is bent by the hands of its Maker.

13 At his order the snow falls and lightning strikes according to his decrees. Job 38:22

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translator did not dare show his readers who were more liberal-minded. However inspired the authors of the Bible were, God did not miraculously free them from the limitations of their culture.

• 15. Modern civilization separates people from nature. In their work, many people see fluorescent lights more often than they see the sun. Many do not know either the silence or the sounds of nature, because noise has invaded everything. However, as soon as we know something about science, we think we know the mysteries of the universe. In our cities, it is increasingly more difficult for us to experience the mystery and the beauty of the universe.

God speaks to us through his creation as authentically as he does in the words of Christ. The languages are different, in the same sense that music tells us something in a way that is different from words. Those who know how to see God in the universe are also able to discover him in great human achievements: dams, electronic computers, buildings, new materials, etc. What emerges from human hands also belongs to God's creation.

14 The storerooms of heaven are opened
and clouds fly away like birds.
15 It is his power that thickens the clouds,
making them freeze and break into hail-
stones.
16a He has only to look and the mountains
are shaken; 17a the voice of his thunder terri-
fies the earth.
16b At his will the south wind blows, 17b as do
cyclones and hurricanes from the north.
18 The snow flutters down like birds and
alights on the ground like locusts.
The eye marvels at the beauty of its white-
ness and the mind is amazed to see it fall.
Ps 147: 16-18 19 He sprinkles frost on the earth like salt;
it freezes and becomes like thorny spikes.
20 The cold north wind blows and turns the
water into ice.
Ice forms on all stagnant water giving it a
freezing coat of armor.
21 He wears down the mountains and
scorches the desert, withering the green
grass as if by fire.
22 A mist is a timely remedy, and dew after
the heat restores it all to life.
Ps 104: 25 23 According to his plan he stilled the great
deep and planted islands in it.
24 Those who cross the seas tell of its
dangers, and we listen in astonishment to
what they relate:
Ps 104: 25 107: 23 25 It is all about strange and marvelous
adventures with marine animals and mon-
sters of all kinds.
26 Thanks be to God, all turns out well and
everything is held together by his word.
27 We shall not give further examples; one
last word: He is everything.
28 Where shall we find the strength to glo-
rify him? For he is the Mighty One, greater
than all his works.
29 The Lord is awesome and sovereignly
great, and admirable in his power.
30 Let your praise exalt the Lord as best
you can, he is greater than you could even
express.
Honor him with all your strength and do
not tire, for you can never praise him enough.
31 Who has seen him and can describe
what he has seen? Who can glorify him as he
merits?
32 Many mysteries greater than these still
remain, for we have only seen a fraction of his
works.
33 The Lord has created all things and to
the godly he has given wisdom.

In praise of ancestors

1Mac 2:51-64 Heb 11 **44** • 1 Let us now glorify illustrious men,
the ancestors of our people.
2 The Lord gave them great glory accord-
ing to his own greatness from the beginning.
3 Some ruled kingdoms and were re-
nowned for their achievements, others were
wise and able to counsel, or spoke as proph-
ets.
4 They led the people with their warnings
or with their knowledge of the popular writ-
ings.
5 Some cultivated music and poetry, 6 oth-
ers were rich and powerful men living peace-
fully in their homes.
7 All were highly respected in their days
and honored by the people they lived with.
8 The names of some lived on and people
still praise them today; 9 others are not re-
membered and have disappeared as if they
never existed. It is the same for their children.
10 But now consider the godly men whose
good deeds have not been forgotten. 11 Those
who came after them benefited from the rich
legacy they left; 12 their race remained faithful
to the Covenant, their children followed their
example. 13 Their family will endure forever
and never will its glory be tarnished. 14 Their
bodies were buried in peace but their memory
lives through generations. 15 People will
speak of their wisdom and the assembly will
celebrate their praise.
Gen 5:24 Heb 11:5 16 Enoch pleased the Lord and was taken
up, calling future generations to repentance.
Gen 6:9 9:9 1P 3:20 2P 2:5 17 Noah was found to be perfectly just; at
the time of divine anger he was the ransom;
through him a remnant was left on earth after
the flood. 18 Eternal covenants were made
with him to ensure that never again would life
be destroyed by flood.

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob

Gen 12:2 Rom 4:1, 13-18 • 19 No one has been found to equal
Abraham in glory, the great ancestor of many
nations. 20 He was faithful to the Law of the
Most High who made a covenant with him, a

• **44.**1 After the hymn to God whose glory is revealed through his creation, the author will present to us God's work in his chosen people, Israel.

In his poem of praise of the ancestors, we have a glimpse of all the famous people of Israel: kings, liberators, prophets, sages, poets. The author notes that there are many courageous and just people who died and whose deeds and virtues will not be recorded after them. He knows that even if all the descendants of a famous man disappear, as in the case of Moses, the people of Israel hold on to the promises of eternity. In this book there is still no sign of faith in a resurrection of persons (except possibly in 48:11 and all hope is fixed on the future of the chosen people).

• **44.**19 In what follows, Ben Sira remembers the most prominent people of sacred history. He attributes to them according to the ideas of his days. He was living in an age when priests had the most important role and the entire life of the Jews revolved around the Temple. So, he gives the priority to the priests, to Aaron, Phine-

covenant that was marked on his flesh, and on the day he was tested he was found faithful. [21] That is why God promised by oath to bless all the nations through his descendants, that he would make them as numerous as the dust of the earth and exalt his posterity like the stars. He promised that their land would stretch from sea to sea, from the River to the ends of the earth.

Gen 17:10
Gen 22:18
1Mac 2:52
Heb 11:17

[22] The Lord renewed his Covenant with Isaac for the sake of his father, Abraham. [23] This Covenant and the blessing of humanity he made to rest on the head of Jacob.

Gal 3:8-9

He assured Jacob of his blessing, giving him the land that would be his and determining the portions to be shared among the twelve tribes.

Moses, Aaron

45 [1] From Jacob's descendants the Lord brought forth an upright man who won the favor of everyone and was loved by God and men – Moses. Blessed be his memory! [2] The Lord gave him glory equal to his holy angels and power that terrified his enemies. [3] At Moses' word he halted disaster; the Lord exalted him in the presence of kings. He gave him commandments for his people and let him glimpse something of his glory.

Ex 8:8
10:18

[4] He chose him from among the living to become holy by being faithful and humble. [5] God let him hear his voice and led him into darkness, where face to face he gave him the commandments, the law of life and knowledge, to teach Jacob the covenant and make his decrees known to Israel.

Ex 19:1
24:18

[6] He raised up Aaron, the brother of Moses, a holy man like Moses, of the tribe of Levi. [7] He made an eternal covenant with him and conferred on him the priesthood of the people.

He honored him by giving him majesty and putting a glorious robe upon him. [8] His vestments and ornaments were splendid in their perfection – breeches, cloak and ephod. [9] As a fringe to his vestment he gave him pomegranates and many golden bells to tinkle as he walked and to be heard in the Temple as a reminder to his people.

Ex 28:31-35, 42

[10] The Lord gave Aaron sacred vestments of gold, blue and purple, the work of artists, the pectoral of judgment, the Urim and Thummim, scarlet yarn spun by a craftsman, [11] precious stones with engravings in a setting of gold, the work of a jeweler, to serve as a memorial with their graven inscriptions of the tribes of Israel. [12] He gave him the turban with a golden diadem engraved with the words of his consecration, a superb ornament, expertly crafted and a delight to the eyes.

Ex 28:2
Ex 28:36

[13] Such things had never been seen before Aaron's time; no outsider ever put them on or ever will, only his children and descendants.

[14] His sacrifices were to be completely burned twice daily, in perpetuity.

[15] It was Moses who consecrated him and anointed him with holy oil. It was for him an eternal covenant and for his descendants, for as long as the heavens would last, to serve the Lord as his priests and bless the people in his name. [16] He chose him from among all the living to offer sacrifice to the Lord and sweet smelling incense as a memorial, to make atonement for the people.

Lev 8:1-13
Lev 16:1

[17] The Lord gave him authority to interpret his commandments and utter decisions, to teach Jacob the divine words and enlighten Israel with his Law. [18] Outsiders conspired against him and were jealous of him in the desert – Dathan, Abiram and their followers and the supporters of Korah, all violent men full of hate. [19] The Lord saw it and was angry; in his wrath he destroyed them. He wrought wonders against them, consuming them in the flames of fire.

Num 16:1
17:15

[20] He increased Aaron's glory by giving him a heritage. He allotted to him the first fruits and to begin with, bread in abundance. [21] For their food is the sacrifice offered to the Lord, which he gave to Aaron and his descendants.

Num 18:12-13

[22] But he was to inherit no land as patrimony, no special portion was to be his own, for the Lord himself is his portion and inheritance.

Num 18:20

Phinehas

[23] As for Phinehas, son of Eleazar, he is the third in glory, for he was full of zeal in the fear of the Lord when he stood firm among a rebellious people with noble courage and made atonement for Israel.

Num 25:7

[24] Consequently, a covenant of peace was concluded with him, making him the leader of the sanctuary and of his people. He and his descendants were to have the dignity of high priesthood forever. [25] It is not like the covenant established with David, the son of Jesse, of the tribe of Judah, for the kingship passes only from father to one of his sons, but the heritage of Aaron passes to all his descendants.

[26] May the Lord give them wisdom of heart to judge his people with justice, so that their prosperity may not dwindle and their glory may live on in their descendants!

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has and Simon II, whom he had known personally.

In 48:11, as in Malachi 3:23, we find the Jewish belief that Elijah would return in the days of the Messiah. For the Jews, Elijah was the man who raised the dead and who had been preserved from death by God. Ben Sira hopes to regain life to see the happy days of salvation.

Joshua and the judges

46 [1] Joshua, son of Nun, was a valiant warrior and as a prophet he was the successor of Moses. He lived up to his name, proving himself to be a savior of God's chosen people, punishing the enemies that attacked them and leading Israel to claim their land.

[2] How magnificent to see him, arm raised and with sword ready to attack the cities!

[3] Who before him had such staying power? He was, indeed, Yahweh's warrior. [4] Was it not he who held back the sun, making one day as long as two? [5] He called on the Most High when the enemy pressed on every side, and the Mighty Lord responded with hailstones of exceptional size. [6] He attacked the enemy nation and destroyed the assailants at the pass of Beth-horan, so that the nations might know the strength of Joshua and that they were fighting against the Lord.

[7] Joshua was loyal and devoted to the Almighty in the time of Moses, he and Caleb, son of Jephunneh. They stood firm against the assembly and tried to keep them from sinning by silencing their wicked murmuring.

[8] Because of this, they were the only two spared out of six hundred thousand people on foot. And they took possession of their inheritance in a land flowing with milk and honey.

[9] The Lord gifted Caleb with strength; this he enjoyed to the end of his days, and he went into the hill country that was given to his children in heritage. [10] With this it was clear to all Israel that it is good to follow the Lord. [11] After that came the judges. Although each of them won his own renown, all were men of faithful heart who did not turn away from the Lord. Blessed be their memory! [12] May their bones spring to life from the tomb and the names of these illustrious men live on in their children!

Samuel

[13] Samuel was a prophet and beloved of the Lord. He established the kingdom and anointed rulers to govern his people.

[14] He judged the assembly according to the Law of the Lord and the Lord protected Jacob. [15] He was accepted as prophet because of his faithfulness, and proved that his words were of a trustworthy seer.

[16] He called on the Almighty Lord when the enemy pressed from all directions and he offered a sucking lamb.

[17] Then with a mighty roar the Lord thundered from heaven [18] and destroyed all the enemy's leaders and the tyrants of Philistia.

[19] Before his time came for eternal rest, Samuel called men to witness before the Lord and his anointed: "I have not taken anyone's belongings, not even his sandals," and there was no one to accuse him.

[20] Even after he died, he prophesied and revealed to the king his death. From the grave he spoke as a prophet to blot out the wickedness of his people.

David

47 [1] After him the Lord raised Nathan to prophesy in the time of David.

[2] As fat is selected from the peace offering, so David was chosen from among the Israelites.

[3] He played with lions and bears as if they were lambs or young goats.

[4] He was still young when he slew a giant to restore the honor of his people; with a sling he aimed a stone that killed the arrogant Goliath.

[5] He invoked the Lord Most High, who gave him strength to slay a mighty warrior, and so exalt the power of his people.

[6] So they glorified him for his ten thousands and praised him as a blessing from the Lord when he was chosen king.

[7] For he wiped out his enemies on all sides and annihilated his adversaries, the Philistines, crushing their power forever.

[8] In all that he did he gave thanks to the Most High, and showed his love for his Maker by singing with all his heart.

[9] He placed singers accompanied by harps before the altar to make beautiful music; [10] he gave splendor to feasts and even greater magnificence to the more solemn occasions, exalting the holy Name of the Lord and having the sanctuary ring with his praises from early morning.

[11] The Lord forgave David's sins and established his power forever; he made a covenant with him for the benefit of the kings and gave him a glorious throne in Israel.

Solomon

[12] A wise son succeeded him and fared well because of him.

[13] Solomon reigned during times of peace, and God gave him rest from war to enable him to build a house for his Name, a sanctuary that would stand forever.

[14] How wise you were in your youth, Solomon! as full of understanding as a river. [15] Your spirit covered the earth, you filled it with proverbs and parables. [16] Your reputation reached distant islands and you were loved for your peace. [17] Your songs, proverbs, parables and interpretation drew the admiration of the world.

[18] In the name of the Lord God, called the God of Israel, you accumulated gold like tin and gathered silver like lead.

[19] But you gave your body to women and became the slave of your senses; [20] you stained your reputation and defiled your de-

scendants, bringing wrath and disaster upon your children because of your foolishness.
1K 12 21 So the nation was divided; from Ephraim came a kingdom in revolt.
22 But God's mercy never fails nor does he forget his promises; he did not deprive his chosen one of descendants nor destroy the race of the one he loved. So to Jacob he gave a remnant and allowed David's family to survive.
23 Solomon rested with his forefathers and left one of his sons to rule after him, the most foolish of men and without intelligence; this was Rehoboam who drove the people to rebellion.
1K 12:26 24 As for Jeroboam, son of Nebat, it was he
2K 17:21-23 who caused Israel to sin and taught Ephraim the way of evil.
From then on their sins increased and later brought about their exile, 25 for they were intent on doing every sort of evil until vengeance fell on them.

~~Elijah~~ and Elisha

1K 17:1 **48** 1 Then came the prophet Elijah like a fire, his words a burning torch.
2 He brought a famine on the people and in his zealous love had them reduced in number.
1K 18:36 3 Speaking in the name of the Lord he closed the heavens, and on three occasions called down fire.
4 How marvelous you were, Elijah, in your
1K 17:17 wondrous deeds! Who could ever boast of being your equal? 5 By the word of the Most High you brought a dead man back to life;
6 you brought kings to destruction and thrust famous men from their beds.
7 You heard a rebuke at Sinai and sentences of punishment at Horeb; 8 you anointed kings to be avengers and prophets
2K 2:11 to succeed you.
9 You were taken up by a whirlwind of
Mal 3:24 flames in a chariot drawn by fiery horses.
10 It was written that you should be the one to calm God's anger in the future before it broke out in fury, to turn the hearts of fathers to their sons and to restore the tribes of Jacob.
11 Happy are those who will see you and
2K 2:9 those who die in love, for we too shall live.
12 Such was Elijah, taken up in a whirlwind, and Elisha was filled with his spirit.
During his life no leader could shake him, no one dominated him. 13 Nothing was too difficult for him and even in death his body prophesied. 14 In life he worked wonders, in death his deeds were amazing.
15 Despite all this, the people were not converted and did not turn away from sin; not until they were deported far from their country and scattered over the earth.
16 The people were greatly reduced in number but they still had a ruler from the line of David. Some of them were upright people, others became sinful.
2K 20:20 2Chr 32:5 Is 22:11 17 Hezekiah fortified his city and brought water within its walls, tunneling the rock with iron tools to construct cisterns.
2K 18:13 18 During his reign Sennacherib began his campaigns and sent off Rabshakeh, and insolent and arrogant as he was, he raised his arm against Zion.
19 Then their courage was shaken, their hands trembled, they felt anguish like women in labor. 20 They stretched out their hands and called on the merciful Lord.
From heaven the Holy One quickly heard them and saved them by the hand of Isaiah.
21 The Lord struck the Assyrian camp and his angel wiped them out.
22 For Hezekiah did what was pleasing to the Lord and was firm in following the ways of David, his father, as the great and faithful prophet Isaiah ordered, a man of trustworthy vision.
23 In his time the sun went back and he lengthened the life of the king.
Is 40:1 24 In the power of the spirit he foresaw the last things and consoled the afflicted people of Zion. 25 He revealed what would happen until the end of time and made hidden events known before they occurred.

~~Other~~ kings and prophets

49 1 The memory of Josiah is like blended incense carefully prepared by the perfumer; it is like delicious honey to every mouth, like music during a banquet.
2 He followed the right way in converting the people and removing the horror of idolatry. 3 He set his heart on the Lord and succeeded in having godliness prevail over wickedness.
4 With the exception of David, Hezekiah and Josiah, the kings were very sinful men. They abandoned the Law of the Most High bringing an end to the kings of Judah.
5 They surrendered their power and their honor to foreign nations. 6 Their enemies set fire to the holy city, making its streets desolate 7 as Jeremiah had foretold.
Ezk 1-3 9-10 8 It was Ezekiel who saw the vision of Glory when the Lord showed it to him above the chariot of the cherubim. 9 He also remembered Job, the one who always followed the way of justice.
10 As for the twelve prophets, may their bones spring to life from the tomb, for they comforted the people of Jacob and saved them with confident hope.
Hg 2:23 11 Can we ever adequately praise Zerubbabel who was like a ring at the finger of God, and 12 likewise Joshua, son of Jozadak? They were men who, in their days, built the Temple

to the Lord, a sanctuary destined for everlasting glory. 13 Lasting too is the memory of Nehemiah, who rebuilt our ruined walls, provided gates and bars and rebuilt our homes. 44:16

14 No one on earth was created to equal Enoch for he was taken up from the earth.

15 And never was there a man like Joseph, the greatest among his brothers, the leader of his people; his bones were honored.

• 16 Shem and Seth were exalted among men, but Adam's glory was greater than any other living being.

~~Simon~~ the priest

50 1 The High Priest Simon, son of Onias, repaired the sanctuary and fortified the Temple during his lifetime.

2 He laid the foundations for the high double wall and for the fortifications surrounding the Temple.

3 In his days a reservoir for water, a cistern as great as a sea, was excavated.

4 Anxious lest his people might perish, he fortified the city against a siege.

Lev 16:13 • 5 How magnificent he was when, surrounded by his people, he emerged from the inner sanctuary 6 like the morning star amidst the clouds, like the full moon, 7 like the sun shining on the Temple of the Most High or a rainbow in a glory of clouds!

8 He was like a rose in spring, a lily beside a stream, a green shoot on a summer day, 9 or incense burning in the censer.

He could be likened to a massive, golden vase adorned with every kind of precious stone, 10 to an olive tree heavy with fruit, or to a cypress rising to the clouds, 11 when, robed in ceremonial garb and in perfect splendor, he went to the sacred altar filling the court of the sanctuary with glory.

12 There he would receive from the hand of the priests the portions of the sacrifice, as he stood by the hearth of the altar encircled by his brethren like a young cedar on Lebanon.

13 It was as if he was surrounded by palm trees when all the sons of Aaron in their splendor, with the offerings to the Lord in their hands, stood before the assembly of Israel.

14 When he had completed the service at the altar and presented with dignity the offering to the Almighty and Most High, 15 he took the cup in his hand and poured out a libation of the juice of the grape at the foot of the altar, a pleasing aroma to the Most High, King of the world.

Num 10:2-10 16 Then the sons of Aaron shouted; they blew their trumpets of solid silver, making a great noise as a memorial before the Most high.

17 Then suddenly all the people bowed down with their faces to the ground and adored the Lord, the Almighty and most High God.

18 The choir as well sang his praises, making beautiful music. 19 And the people made supplication to the Most High and prayed to their merciful Lord, until the ceremony was over and the service of the Lord completed.

Num 6:23-27 20 The High Priest then came down and raised his hands towards the whole assembly of the people of Israel to give them in a loud voice the blessing of the Lord and to have the honor of pronouncing his name.

21 ~~Then for a second time the people~~

• **49.**16 Suddenly, before praising the high priest Simon, his contemporary, Ben Sira remembers origins. In the beginning, the first man. Surpassing the current ideas of the Jews who, until then, did not look much further than their own history, Ben Sira thinks about the first human, the father of all humanity. Adam represents all sinful humanity, called to salvation. He is the first human also, who bears in himself the destiny of all the rest. In Romans 5:12-20, Paul will speak of Christ as the New Adam. Of him one can say: "Adam is above every living being."

• **50.**5 Let us underline this lengthy portrait of Simon, the high priest. Ben Sira, who carried out responsibilities and knew life, feels no shame in expressing his great admiration for the Temple rituals. As for any Jewish believer, the sacred vestments, the music and the solemn ceremonies reveal something to him about the world of God which is splendor, happiness, celebration and praise.

The last paragraph serves as the conclusion of this part of the book (chaps. 44–50). Ben Sira blesses his readers using the same words that Simon addressed to the people on their knees.

bowed in worship to receive the blessing of the Most High:

22 "And now, bless the Lord of the universe who everywhere does great things, who exalts our days from birth and is merciful to us.

23 May he give us happiness and grant peace to Israel in our days and forever!

24 May he continue to give us his blessings and be a savior to us in our days."

25 There are two nations I greatly dislike, the third is not a nation: 26 they are the inhabitants of Mount Seir, the Philistines and the foolish people who live in Shechem.

27 Instruction in understanding and knowledge, that is what Jesus the son of Sira, the son of Eleazar of Jerusalem, has written in this book as he poured out the wisdom of his heart.

28 Happy the one who pays attention to this teaching and gains wisdom by taking it to heart.

29 Doing that, he will be strong in all circumstances, for the light of the Lord is his path.

Prayer of Jesus, son of Sirach

Ex 15:2 **51** • 1 I will give thanks to you, O Lord and King; I praise you, my God and Savior, I give thanks to your Name.

2 For you are my protector and helper, you have delivered my body from destruction, from the snare of the wicked tongue and from lips that speak lies.

In the presence of those who stood against me, you were my helper, my deliverer.

3 In the fullness of mercy and the glory of your Name, you delivered me from the teeth of those ready to devour me, from the hand of those wanting to take my life and from my many trials.

4 You rescued me from choking fire on every side; you saved me from a fire I had not kindled.

5 You delivered me from the depths of the netherworld, from an impure tongue and lying words, 6 from vicious slander reported to the king. I was near to death, I was already at the gates of the netherworld.

7 They surrounded me on every side with no one to help me. I looked for human comfort and there was none.

8 Then, Lord, I remembered your mercy and your deeds from all eternity, knowing that you deliver those who hope in you and save them from the hands of their enemies.

9 I sent up my prayer from the earth, begging to be delivered from death.

10 I called on the Lord, the Father of my Lord: "Do not forsake me in the day of my affliction, when I am helpless against arrogant enemies; I will praise your name continually and sing to you my thanksgiving."

11 And my prayer was heard, you saved me from destruction and delivered me from an evil plight.

12 That is why I will give you thanks and praise and bless the Name of the Lord.

13 In my youth, before I set out on my travels, I openly sought wisdom in prayer; 14 before the Temple I asked for her and I will pursue her to the end of my days. 34:9-12 Wis 8:2

15 While she blossomed like a ripening cluster, my heart was delighted in her; my feet followed the right path, because from my youth I searched for her.

16 As soon as I began listening to her she was given to me, and with her, much instruction.

17 With her help I made progress and I will glorify him who gives me wisdom, 18 for I decided to put it into practice and ardently seek what is good. I shall not regret it.

19 My soul has struggled to possess her. I have been attentive to observe

• **51.**1 This thanksgiving for liberation is a complement to the book of Ben Sira. The listing of the dangers from which God can free people, recalls for us the heroes of the Old Testament: Daniel in the lions' den, Daniel and his friends in the furnace, Joseph imprisoned, Susanna, David.

This is used for the feasts of martyrs in the liturgy of the Church. Their death (see Wis 3:1) was liberation from evil. Like Jesus, martyrs did not escape from evil and death, but they conquered both, overcoming natural fear and forgiving their enemies.

the Law, and after my faults I have stretched out my hands to heaven and lamented my ignorance of her.

20 My love of her increased and I found her in repentance. It was through her from the beginning that I learned to possess my heart. She will not forsake me.

21 With my whole being I sought her; that is why I won what is best.

22 In return for this, the Lord has given me words to praise him.

23 Come near, you who are without understanding and join her school.

Am 8:11 24 Why do you say you are deprived of all this and that your souls are thirsty?

25 This is what I say: Buy this without money; 26 put your neck under her yoke and let your minds receive instruction; it is very near and within your reach. Is 55:11 Mt 11:29

27 See for yourselves: my toil has been slight and I found deep rest.

28 Be instructed, whatever the cost, and you will gain what is better than gold. Mt 13:44-46

29 Let your soul find joy in the mercy of the Lord, and do not be ashamed to praise him.

30 Do your work within the appointed time, and the Lord in his time will give you your reward.